

That's right, everyone! I talked about it and now here it is, the second book in the Guardian of Azkaban series, telling the story of Esdras Demnin in his second year at Hogwarts as a fifth year student. For those of you not familiar with my work, I request that you read the first Guardian of Azkaban story; it'll give you all the background you need. While you're there, review it, too.

Remember, like the HP books themselves, if you start in the middle, you're going to be confused about a few things... And a last word of warning, *text in italics is spoken Azkabaaner, the native language of Dementors*, and I don't own HP.

All that said, I proudly present to you...

The Guardian of Azkaban

Book 2: Trial of the Guardian

Chapter 1 – Let the Games Begin

Life for a Dementor of Azkaban could be considered anything except relaxing, yet Admiral Esdras Demnin of the Azkaban Guard was having the time of his life. This is because the three hundred thirteen year old Esdras, while not the only Dementor animagus, was the only Dementor animagus capable of taking human form. It was this special ability which led the then captain of the Azkaban Guard to be stationed at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry during the hunt for Sirius Black the year before.

The Dementor had made the most of his time during his assignment. He had blended in with the students, even after the revelation of his true nature, and helped to change their opinions of his kind. He played Quidditch as one of the Ravenclaw team beaters, and had even gained a romance with the beautiful Katie Bell, a chaser on the Gryffindor team. He was a soldier and a student, and his hard work had gained him an invitation to return for another year at the school and a promotion to the rank of rear admiral, complete with his own fleet command, charged with the continual protection of the school that held his friends from Sirius Black.

For now, the hunt was on hiatus. In the eyes of Azkaban, this was temporary, since school was not in session and military divisions had yet to be assigned into the Fourth Fleet. However, in the eyes of those in the know, the hunt was permanently suspended, as members of Esdras' infantry division knew that Sirius Black was in fact innocent of his crimes, and had, the previous year, helped him escape a horrible fate.

To this end, the Dementor was blending in with the mortal Muggle crowds outside a pub in Edinburgh. Standing at just over six feet tall, with dusty blonde hair and glowing green eyes hidden behind sunglasses, he currently looked every part the tourist. He was even dressed for the part, wearing a pair of faded jeans and a black t-shirt which had been charmed, like all his mortal clothing and cloaks, to inhibit his powers. Beside him stood Cho Chang, the seeker of his house Quidditch team, they were enjoying the evening after having spent the day seeing the sights.

Cho smiled as they began to walk down the street. "So, what do you think of my hometown?"

The Dementor smirked. "Most Dementors don't think too kindly of Edinburgh since the treaty was signed here. But it's a nice little city." His eyes traced across the skyline to the imposing form of Edinburgh Castle. "A nice little city with impressive fortifications."

The girl slipped a hand into his arm and laughed, leaning against him as they walked. "You get used to it. It's just part of the skyline."

The lights surrounding the citadel had come on, illuminating the ancient fortification as the evening light continued to fade. The Dementor took off his sunglasses and stared at it with wide glowing eyes. "Now that looks very impressive."

They continued walking for a few more minutes, taking in some of the shops that were still open. They turned down a poorly lit alley, which would lead them to a magical pub with a Floo connection for Cho to take home. "Will you be going back to Azkaban tonight?"

The Dementor shook his head. "No, I'll be Apparating over to Katie's and spending the night there. Then I have business with the Ministry

in London.” He shrugged slightly. “Headmaster Dumbledore himself summoned me and didn’t go into much detail about it.”

Cho nodded and pulled out her wand, tapping the correct brick and revealing the door to The Rusty Goblet, a moderately upscale wizarding pub hidden in the New Town district of Edinburgh. They entered and moved towards the fireplace. “Well, join me for a butterbeer before you go?”

Esdras shook his head slowly. “I’d love to, but I really ought to get over to Katie’s so I can spend some time with her, too.” He smiled and pulled her into a tight hug. “But I had a lovely day. Thank you for inviting me.”

The mortal returned the hug and smiled. “I’m glad you were able to make it out. I’ll talk to you again before school starts.” She took a handful of Floo powder from the pot atop the mantle and looked back over her shoulder to the Dementor. “Take care of yourself. We’re going to win the quidditch cup this year.”

The Dementor grinned and nodded. His friend tossed the powder into the fire, stepped into the green flames, and was spun away home in a wink. Esdras didn’t linger, and stepped back out into the gathering night. He drew his wand and Apparated with a quiet double popping sound across Scotland to a small house near Kilmarnock. The lights were on inside and a single person was waiting in the darkness on the steps. When he opened the gate and floated towards the house, the form stood up and almost ran down the path to meet him.

In the late twilight, Katie Bell ran and jumped into the arms of Esdras Demnin. No words were spoken as their lips met in the darkness. When finally they pulled away, they were both slightly flushed and out of breath. Warm brown eyes gazed into his glowing green eyes, her smile lit up the night and her voice was a soft, breathless whisper. “Hi.”

The next morning dawned clear and warm. Esdras awoke from his comfortable bed in the guest bedroom of Bellmont, the home of the Bell family. Today was rather important. He would be going to the Ministry of Magic and representing Azkaban. While this wouldn’t be

his first official duty as admiral of the Fourth Fleet, to date it would be his most evident. As a result, it was in his best interest to look his best. He wore a finely tailored black suit which Cho had helped him pick out the day before. All told, he thought he looked very sharp.

As he floated down the stairs with his cloak in hand, he heard a wolf whistle coming from the living room. Stepping into the room, Katie virtually pounced upon him. "I could get used to this side of you, Admiral Demnin."

Esdras laughed brightly and effortlessly floated with her into the dining room. "Well, I'm going to be meeting with ministry officials. I have to represent Azkaban as best I can when I'm in mortal and Dementor form. A simple meeting really doesn't call for the dress uniform, so I hope this works."

Elizabeth Bell, the matriarch of the Bell family smiled and handed him a cup of tea as the young couple sat down at the table. "It certainly does work. You look very professional. Do you know anything about the meeting?"

The Dementor shrugged and began to work on a plate of eggs. "No, ma'am, I was only told to meet Headmaster Dumbledore in the atrium of the Ministry at nine o'clock. He was very secretive about the whole thing and told me that I would be told everything I needed to know at the meeting. But I figured that if the meeting is at the Ministry, I'll probably be representing the Guard Command, hence the nice mortal suit and uniform cloak."

Katie smiled proudly and spoke in the harsh whispers of Azkaban. *"You look very impressive, my darling. You'll make a wonderful impression on whomever you meet."*

Finishing his breakfast and rising from the table, he smiled softly. *"Thank you, dear."*

Eric Bell, Katie's elder brother, looked at the pair with disinterest. "I wish you two would quit doing that. Some of us here don't quite understand Azkabaaner, you know."

Katie smirked and stuck her tongue out at her brother. "Of course, that's why I do it."

Esdras finished clasping his cloak and straightened out the single silver crescent moons that denoted his rank and rested on his shoulders. He shrugged, but his eyes were playful. "I'll speak in whatever language I'm spoken to in. English, Azkabaaner, after a couple decades they're all the same." Giving his cloak one last brush down, he squared his shoulders. "Well, I'm off to the Ministry."

Katie got up and followed him to the door. "Will you be spending tonight here as well?"

The Dementor sighed. "I don't know yet. Regardless, I'll come back here this evening but I may not be able to stay for long. I have a planning meeting back on Azkaban to discuss the configuration of my fleet before the school year starts and Admiral Grim wants to get that done quickly so the divisions can have time to prepare for their assignments. I'll most likely put in a Floo call during the day and see when he wants to have that done."

She nodded in reply as they stepped out onto the front porch. Esdras spun on his heels and leaned in to kiss her. They were slow to break away and when they finally did, she had a playful smile on her face. "Have a good day at work, darling."

Esdras prepared to Apparate and paused. "Hey, meet me at the Leaky Cauldron for lunch. I want to spend as much time with you as possible."

Katie nodded as he floated off the porch and Disapparated with a smile and a soft double pop.

Apparating into the atrium of the Ministry of Magic, Esdras Demnin unconsciously straightened his cloak again and looked around for Albus Dumbledore. Sure enough, the form of the wizened wizard was standing by the Fountain of Magical Brethren that dominated the space, looking calmly into the glassy water. The Dementor lifted up and floated towards him. "Good morning, Headmaster."

Dumbledore turned and smiled brightly at the floating form. "Good morning, Admiral Demnin. I trust you had a pleasant trip in?"

The Dementor nodded happily. "Yes, sir. I spent the night last night at Katie's. Her parents were nice enough to put me up in their guest room."

They had been walking towards the check in station, and their conversation paused as Dumbledore had his wand weighed. Esdras simply flashed his Azkaban Guard badge and they were through. As they waited for the elevator, the headmaster continued. "How is Miss Bell?"

The Dementor smiled happily. "She's quite well, sir. It's good to see her. It's been a long month only exchanging letters."

The pair stepped into the elevator along with a mass of interoffice memos. The mortal wizard laughed softly as he pressed the button for level five. "The miracle of young love."

As the doors shut, Esdras leaned against the wall and regarded his headmaster. "You were very vague about the reason why I'm here. Care to clarify, sir?"

The wizard merely shook his head. "It will all be explained very soon. But I will say that something special is happening this year and I thought it best to include our Azkaban friends so that no one would be left out."

The Dementor nodded and they continued the ride in silence. When they reached their floor, Esdras walked beside Dumbledore as they wound their way through the Department of International Magical Cooperation. The headmaster led the Dementor to one of the many conference rooms and calmly entered. The room contained a single circular table around which a few wizards had already taken seats. They rose as the pair entered.

Dumbledore began with introductions, starting with the most familiar figure in the room. "I believe you already know Minister Cornelius Fudge." He continued to a very stuffy looking grey haired man and a redhead of obvious origins. "Representing the Department of

International Magical Cooperation is Mister Bartemius Crouch, Senior and Mister Percy Weasley.” The last individual was a tall, friendly looking man. “From the Department of Magical Games and Sports is Mister Ludo Bagman. Gentlemen, this is Admiral Esdras Demnin of the Azkaban Guard Command.”

From his section of the round table, Crouch glared quietly at the new arrival. “Albus, I don’t see the purpose in inviting a Dementor to this meeting. He has as little right to be here as his kind has to be hovering around Hogwarts.”

Esdras arched his eyebrows slightly and shrugged, raising his hood and taking his Dementor form. His harsh voice was haunting in the small conference room. “I put my faith in Headmaster Dumbledore. If he believes I have reason to be here, then I have reason to be here.”

Minister Fudge put his hands up, trying to placate the man. “Barty, please, we’ve been over this. The Dementors are stationed there for the student’s protection, and if we’re going to be holding this tournament, we’ll need to keep them in the loop.” He turned his attention to the pair. “Please help yourself to tea and pastries, and then find your seats at the table.”

Esdras bowed politely and retook human form before moving to the refreshments table, taking a muffin and a cup of tea. He found his chair which was marked with a placard, “Adm. Esdras Demnin, Azkaban Guard Command.” To his left, Dumbledore sat quietly, staring at one of the many paintings on the wall. To his right sat Percy Weasley, trying for all he was worth to pretend that Dementors didn’t exist and that certainly if they did, one was not sitting beside him.

After a few moments, the door opened again. When Esdras looked up, he bolted into the air, hovering in midair a few feet off the ground. In the doorway stood a wizard and a witch, the wizard was familiar to Esdras but the witch invoked a very rare fear. Picking up on his discomfort, Dumbledore was quick with the introductions. “Madame Maxime, you’ve met everyone else here so may I present Admiral Esdras Demnin of the Azkaban Guard Command. Please forgive him. He is not used to dealing with people taller than he.” He calmly addressed the floating form. “Esdras, Madame Olympe Maxime is the

headmistress of Beauxbatons Academy of Magic. And I believe I don't have to introduce headmaster Igor Karkaroff of the Durmstrang Institute."

The woman, who stood at a solid twelve feet, nodded her assent and carefully addressed the hovering form. "Bon jour, Amiral."

The Dementor remained hovering for a moment, calming himself and reminding himself that he was free to be taller. When his breathing had returned to normal, he took a ground level hover and his Dementor form. "Good morning, Headmistress. Good morning, prisoner mu lambda 442."

Everyone in the room paled, and Karkaroff turned white as a sheet at the mention of his Azkaban prisoner number. He tried his best to put a smile on his face, but his voice was still shaky. "Good morning, Admiral. Am I to take it then that this isn't our first encounter?"

Esdras rounded the table and offered a hand first to the Beauxbatons representative, then Karkaroff himself. "No, we have not met before. I am aware of you by reputation only."

The Durmstrang headmaster looked cautiously at him before taking his outstretched hand. Esdras returned to his mortal form as everyone took their seats. Ludo Bagman stood up and cleared his throat, indicating the meeting was about to begin. "I'd like to thank you all for coming here this morning and remind you all that this meeting is confidential. Since we have a new person joining us today, I thought I would begin with an overview of our objective." He turned to face the Dementor. "Put simply, Admiral Demnin, we're bringing back the Triwizard Tournament."

Chapter 2 – Professional Duty

The meeting finally adjourned for lunch, and Esdras rose from his chair and stretched lazily in midair. As he gathered up his notes on the meeting, Ludo Bagman approached him and struck up a conversation. “Word on the street is that you’re a Quidditch player, Admiral Demnin.”

The Dementor looked up and smiled brightly, happy to be discussing something relevant and exciting. “Yes, sir. I’ve been a beater for a little over a century and a half now.”

Bagman laughed and patted him hard on the back. “I only wish I had that kind of longevity. I’d still be out on the pitch if I did.” He sighed sadly. “Got a favorite for the World Quidditch Cup?”

Esdras shrugged. “We’ve got a pool going back on the island. I have a few Galleons on Ireland, but it’s all in good fun. We’ll most likely listen to it on the wireless. We always make a big party out of it.”

Ludo nodded and reached into his coat pocket. “Well, I’ll tell you what. Why don’t you be the first one on the island to find out if you’ve won the pool?” In his hand were two slips of cardstock, finely printed with the World Quidditch Cup logo. “Call it a gift from one beater to another.”

The Dementor took the two slips in hand and stared at them with wide, glowing eyes. He looked at Ludo in disbelief. “Are these...?”

He nodded. “Top Box, too. Best seats in the house.” He smiled and pulled out a long sheet of parchment. Names and amounts were clearly listed on it. “And if you’d like to get yourself into a real betting pool...”

Esdras heard none of this. He was too busy staring at the tickets in the hand. “I’m going to the World Quidditch Cup.” He held the tickets close, and spun around in midair. “I’m going to the World Quidditch Cup! I can’t believe it!” He quickly shook hands with Ludo Bagman and gathered together the last of his things. “I can’t believe this, I have to tell Katie.” He looked at the clock and cursed in Azkabaaner.

"I have to get going. I have to meet her for lunch. Thank you again, sir!"

Any reply by Ludo was lost as the Dementor floated out of the room and down the hallway to catch the elevator. When he was back down in the Atrium he didn't even stop to Apparate, choosing instead to Apparate on the move. He appeared twenty feet above Diagon Alley, floating towards the Leaky Cauldron. He touched down and walked through the door, looking quickly around the darkened interior.

His quarry was at a table off to the side. Katie smiled as he entered and waved. He hopped and glided between patrons and tables until he got to her and lifted her from her chair, spinning her around wildly. She laughed at his enthusiasm. "Well, if I had known you'd miss me that much, I wouldn't have just settled for lunch."

The innuendo was lost on Esdras. "We're going to the World Quidditch Cup!"

Katie looked at him severely, her brown eyes narrow. "Very funny, Esdras. You know as well as I do that the finals have been sold out for weeks now."

He set her back down and reached into his pocket, pulling out the two tickets. He flashed them to her and spoke in a low, excited voice. "Ludo Bagman from Magical Games was one of the people there at the meeting and we talked about Quidditch and we are both beaters and he gave me tickets. He gave us tickets, top box tickets."

If his companion heard any of this, she didn't let on. Katie was too busy staring at the tickets before her. "These are real. Oh Merlin, these are real!" She flew up from her seat and latched her arms around his neck. "We're going to the World Quidditch Cup!"

The other patrons of the Leaky Cauldron were treated to a good solid minute of Dementor and mortal jumping up and down happily with the tickets. When the pair finally settled down, Esdras reluctantly sat down and grabbed a menu. "We have to hurry. I have to be back at the Ministry for the continuation of the meeting by half past one."

Katie arched an eyebrow. "This is a long meeting. What's it all about?"

Esdras smirked to himself. "I'd love to tell you. Really, I would. But it is top secret and I have my orders."

The mortal huffed. "You Dementors and your secrets." She smiled playfully. "I bet I could get it out of you."

The Dementor chose to ignore her. "Is the shepherd's pie any good here?"

Lunch passed far too quickly for the Dementor and soon he was seeing Katie back to the fireplace to Floo off to Bellmont. She hugged him tightly. "You really are amazing, you know?"

Esdras just looked down and scuffed a shoe on the hearth bricks. "I was in the right place at the right time. Those tickets are just luck."

Katie smiled and kissed him softly. "I wasn't talking about the tickets." She pulled away and tossed the powder into the fire. "I'll see you back at home." She stepped back into the green flames. "Bellmont."

His lunch date over, the Dementor quickly returned to the ministry, Apparating back into the Atrium. He had a few minutes left so he took the elevator down to the lower levels to visit the fireplace that was authorized for Dementor use. He passed through the six steel doors charmed to recognize Dementors and entered the small room where the fireplace was located. It took only a few seconds for him to open up a connection to the Guard Command offices. He was greeted by a familiar hood. "*Thank you for calling the Azkaban Guard Command Central Office. This is Lieutenant Stephanie Trieste, how may I direct your call?*"

Esdras chuckled. "*Stephanie, this is Esdras. I need to talk to Admiral Grim and I don't have much time.*"

Stephanie's voice lightened immediately. "*Of course, Admiral Demnin. Please hold the line.*"

There was a pause and the fire went blank before the more imposing hood of Admiral Judas Grim came through. *"Esdras, it's nice of you to call. How are things going with the mortals?"*

Esdras shrugged. *"Some better than others, sir. The meeting will continue in a few minutes, so I'm afraid I don't have long to talk. You wished to set up a time to discuss fleet configurations?"*

The commander of operations nodded. *"Yes, I believe the day after tomorrow will suffice, at nine in the morning."*

Esdras nodded in reply. *"Yes, sir. That sounds fine."*

Admiral Grim's voice took on a bemused tone. *"That should give you another evening with your Katie, if I'm not mistaken, and plenty of time to make the transit back to the island."*

He laughed in reply. *"Correct on both counts, sir."*

Judas bowed his head slightly. *"We'll see you then, Admiral. Safe travels."*

Esdras saluted quickly. *"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."*

The flames in the grate died out to ashes and Esdras floated back to his feet. He looked to the clock on the wall and saw that he had only a few minutes to make it back to the conference room. He floated quickly past the steel doors and back into the more presentable portions of the Ministry for the remainder of a day of note taking and secret mortal meetings.

The scene upon his return to Bellmont was something that Esdras wanted to be repeated day after day for centuries. He Apparated home from the ministry and appeared in the yard of the house with a soft double pop. Sitting on the porch, illuminated by sunlight and putting its radiance to shame, was Katie. At the sound, she looked up from her book and smiled a dazzling smile for him. She stood up as he walked up the stairs. *"You never have told me why you make two pops when Apparating."*

Esdras shrugged and pulled her into a hug which she eagerly returned. "One pop is me and the other is my animagus form. If I were Apparating in my natural form, I'd make one pop like everyone else."

Katie made a noise of understanding and nodded before standing on her tiptoes to catch him in a passionate kiss. "Mom is in the kitchen and dinner will be ready in a bit. How did your meeting at the Ministry go?"

He shrugged and sat down in the nearest chair. "Well enough, I suppose. The people from International Magical Cooperation were surprisingly uncooperative in regards to Dementors." He let out a wry chuckle. "They finally started taking me seriously when I abandoned mortal form. I don't like having to resort to scare tactics, but sometimes..."

Katie sighed and leaned in to give him another kiss. "Well, just remember that not every mortal is like that. Some of us actually find you Dementors to be quite enjoyable. Do you want something to drink?"

The Dementor looked up idly. "Butterbeer would be nice."

The mortal nodded softly and went into the house, returning a few moments later with two bottles. She handed one off to the still seated Dementor. "So, what was the meeting about today?"

Esdras stretched out and took a sip from the bottle. "I told you at lunch, the meeting is top secret. But I will say that something incredibly amazing is going to happen this year."

Sitting down in the seat beside him, Katie huffed and looked disappointed. "Oh fine, just tease me about it." At the apologetic look from her boyfriend, Katie smiled playfully. "Don't get that look, I understand completely. Did you get to talk to Admiral Grim like you had planned?"

The Dementor nodded and took another sip from his bottle. "Yes, I did. I have to be back on the island the day after tomorrow. So I can

stay the night tonight if I'm welcome. I just have to leave sometime tomorrow around midday."

The mortal made an excited noise and left her seat, sitting down on the Dementor's lap. "Of course you're welcome here." She wrapped her arms around him tightly and whispered softly in his ear. "It's hard to be away from you, you know."

Wrapping his arms around her waist, Esdras nodded and leaned into the hug. "Believe me, I know. But we'll have the Quidditch Cup and school will start back up sooner than we think." He perked as he remembered the tickets stored in his pocket. "Did you talk to your parents about the Cup match? You can come with me, right?"

Katie nodded happily. "Yes, I did, and they agreed of course. They'll want to know if we have any plans to stay overnight, though."

Esdras shook his head slowly. "As much as I'd like to, I really shouldn't. I'll be busy with fleet operations, so I should only just take that day. I can side-along Apparate you and we can float in from a few thousand feet up to avoid the crowd."

The mortal leaned against the Dementor and smiled playfully. "Oh, the many advantages of an immortal, flight capable boyfriend."

The two stayed on the porch, content with their own thoughts and each other, until Mrs. Bell came to call them in for dinner.

Chapter 3 – The Onus of Command

The doors of the Azkaban Super-maximum Security Wizarding Prison opened to accept the floating form before them. Admiral Esdras Demnin returned to duty and abandoned the morning sun as he stepped into the foreboding halls of his place of employment. He glided quietly down the dark hallways, ignoring the ever present moans of the imprisoned souls. The float to the Guard Command offices was uneventful and as he entered the room, every Dementor in the room snapped to attention. Stephanie Trieste, the secretary on duty, called out the required address. *“Admiral on deck.”*

Esdras chuckled softly; he still was not used to the prestige of his new rank. *“As you were.”* The assembled Dementors returned to their business as Esdras made his way to the duty secretary’s desk. *“Good morning, Stephanie.”*

Lieutenant Trieste, still standing, bowed deeply to the admiral and spoke warmly. *“Good morning, Admiral.”* At the narrowing of his hood, she laughed and acquiesced. *“Good morning, Esdras. How was your trip?”*

Esdras shrugged. *“Uneventful. The winds were with me across the North Sea. I made good time. Is Admiral Grim ready for me?”*

Stephanie nodded. *“Yes, he’s expecting you. You can go right in.”*

The admiral nodded and went through the door leading to Grim’s office. The elder admiral rose up as he entered. Esdras stopped to salute his superior and the gesture was returned. *“Well, Esdras, let’s get down to business. You have a fleet to assemble and deploy. Have you given any thought to it at all?”*

Esdras nodded and the two admirals took seats at opposite sides of the impressive ebony desk that formed the centerpiece of the admiral’s office. *“Well, sir, I’ve decided that I would like to keep the Thirteenth Infantry under my command. I’ve been with them for half a century now and they’re like brothers to me.”*

Judas Grim laughed quietly. *“I figured as much, I’ve already written out duty rosters for the next quarter without them. You have two more*

military positions to fill, a specialist division position, and secretarial and medical staff."

Esdras nodded slowly, deep in thought. *"With everything that happened this last year, I believe that Micah Redoubt, Veras Maul, and their divisions proved themselves exceptionally well. I request the Ninety First and the Eighth Infantries. As for the specialist division, I've given this a lot of thought. I want Kira Kirin's Two Hundred Twelfth Research and Development Division. I trust her."*

Admiral Grim raised his hood in surprise at this choice. *"A research division, why would you want a research division?"*

Esdras leaned back. *"I think you know why, sir. In the event of an emergency, I can transfer control of the Quicksilver projects to a secure group under my immediate command."*

Grim sighed. *"Operation Quicksilver? Is that what this is all about?"* He rose from his desk and floated out across the room. *"Esdras, I have had doubts about Quicksilver for over a decade now. Granted it had its purpose when you conceived it back during the last mortal war, but I don't even know why it still exists in this day and age."*

Esdras rose as well, turning to face his superior officer. *"It exists as a failsafe in case another war breaks out. Or even worse, if a Dementor civil war breaks out. Now more than ever, we need that failsafe. You know as well as I do that the Death Eater threat still exists, and I was actively recruited by one of Voldemort's lieutenants when he was in power. Our technology far outstrips that of mortal magical technology. Every one of the Quicksilver projects is something that would radically alter the balance of power in a conflict. In the case of a civil war, that could mean the fall of the royal house."*

Grim had the sensibility to look slightly apologetic at the mention of this. He addressed the admiral formally. *"You are correct, my Lord. The royal house must not fall."*

Esdras sighed. *"Judas, don't call me that. I'm just an admiral, and I'm your subordinate on top of that. Now, will you refuse me the 212th?"*

Judas shook his head slowly. *"No, Esdras. You can have your research division. And I'll even transfer some of the Quicksilver projects into their control. But don't think I'm doing this out of any sense of false paranoia. If they're going to be working so far from home, they may as well be working on something interesting."*

Demnin laughed softly. *"Yes, sir, of course."* He looked to the office door for a few seconds before turning to face Grim again. *"Sir, how long has Trieste been working as secretary for the Guard Command?"*

The elder admiral shrugged. *"A decade or so now. She'll be up for promotion to full lieutenant in another couple years."*

Esdras pondered this for a moment. *"With your permission, I'd like to speed that along. I want her to head secretarial services for the Fourth Fleet."*

Judas shrugged. *"I don't see why not. Will you be pulling the rest of your compliment from the secretary pool?"*

"I think so, but I'll most likely rely on Trieste's recommendations on the matter. She's worked with them for longer and would know who would fit best in a deployed fleet."

Grim nodded. *"That leaves medical services."*

Esdras' response was immediate. *"The 1102nd Field Hospital Division under Dr. Michaelis Transom."*

A soft laugh met this pronouncement. *"How did I guess? You've kept your friends close so far, it makes sense that you'd want the medical services of the same doctor who brought you into the world."*

The young admiral spoke carefully. *"I wouldn't ask for my friends if they hadn't proven themselves to be efficient and skilled officers."*

The elder admiral nodded in reply. *"I wouldn't grant your requests if they were made for any reason otherwise."*

With a final nod, Esdras steeled himself for the last request. *"Sir, there is another matter that I would like to bring up. I have discussed this with Headmaster Dumbledore and Minister Fudge and they both agree. Well, I think Fudge was too scared to say otherwise, actually. Regardless, with so many Dementors deployed for an indeterminate amount of time, I believe that some accommodation should be made for families. There is plenty of room; we could create a small town in one of the hills surrounding the lake. And Dumbledore has graciously agreed to personally see to the energy requirements of a town. It would be optional, of course, but the men having their families while deployed would help keep morale up. Fudge even signed the order to provide a special exemption from the Treaty of Edinburgh settlement restrictions for the Fourth Fleet."*

Grim considered this for a moment before he finally nodded, sounding quite impressed. *"I agree; there's no telling how long the hunt for Sirius Black will continue. Utilize the 778th Engineer division to aid in the construction of a base. One month should suffice. Will there be anything else?"*

Esdras snapped to attention. *"No, sir."*

His superior nodded. *"Your requests for the 91st and 8th Infantries, 212th R and D, 1102nd Field Hospital, and 778th Engineer divisions are approved, as is your request for the promotion of Stephanie Trieste, her transfer and the transfers of four other members of the secretarial pool to your command. Have the paperwork for these on my desk by tomorrow."*

The young admiral saluted. *"Yes, sir."* With a flurry of cloaks, he swiftly exited the room. He exited through the door and sighed as the Dementors in the room again snapped to attention and returned to their duties at his word. He floated quickly over to Stephanie behind her desk and leaned forward until they were hood to hood. *"Stephanie, how would you like to see the world?"*

Reactions from all the personnel concerned had been positive, especially with the news that a base would be set up to allow for families. Veras Maul was particularly happy, since his wife was due to

give birth in a few months and he could be assured of being there for her, even if they weren't on the island for the birth. Stephanie Trieste had been ecstatic about the chance to see even part of the world, since she had never been off the island. And the whole of the Thirteenth Infantry had simply promised to follow their old friend to the ends of the earth.

The admiral had one last stop to make, and that took him into the heart of the West Mountain where the Cerah Hospital Complex, the major Dementor hospital named after the god of medicine, was located. Cerah was also home to the 1102nd Field Hospital division, and as he made his way through the scrubbed stone corridors, he found himself lost in thought. So much so, that he didn't even notice the hovering form ahead was the one he was looking for.

A kindly voice swept him out of his thoughts. *"Well then, young prince, what is it that brings you to me today? A strained float bladder from flying too fast, a collapsed lung from a bludger gone awry?"*

Esdras laughed and floated quickly to the Dementor doctor. He dressed in doctor's cloaks, the arms of the garment fitting snugly against his skeletal arms so as not to impede their movement or brush against anything. Upon his shoulders, he wore the rank insignia of a commander. The admiral ignored his salute and drew the doctor into a hug. *"No such luck today, my old friend. It is good to see you, Dr. Transom."*

Michaelis Transom returned the hug and, when they broke, he bowed deeply since kneeling would draw too much attention. *"A thousand blessings be upon the royal house, young prince."*

Esdras put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed. *"And a thousand blessings be upon this loyal house."* He bowed in respect to his elder. *"How are you?"*

Michaelis sighed. *"The life of an Azkaban doctor is days of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror. But we survive. And what of yourself, young prince? You are an admiral now, with a fleet command, and deep within the mortal school system. You're making quite a name for yourself."*

The admiral laughed as they floated down the hall. *"I suppose that's one way to look at it. But since you mention it, I have come to take you with me. Look after my fleet, old friend."*

The doctor sighed and shook his head. *"Esdras, I am too old to go traipsing about the countryside on deployment. I'm almost six hundred years old. Leave the field work to the younger cloaks."*

Esdras shook his head and took his friend by the shoulders. *"I would believe you if you acted like you were six hundred. Now come, Michaelis, I need you beside me. No one else will do."*

Michaelis let out a long, heavy sigh. *"You know I am unable to say no to you, young prince. I will obey."*

The admiral caught the doctor's hand and squeezed hard. *"You won't regret this, Captain."*

The doctor huffed. *"I'm only a commander, Esdras."*

Esdras was already floating back down the hall. He called back over his shoulder. *"Not anymore!"*

It was exactly two weeks to the day and all the paperwork, forms, promotions, and approvals were submitted, signed, and dated. The Fourth Fleet of the Azkaban Guard was in full operational mode and the divisions were currently in formation outside the prison. Esdras, with silver crescent moons shining in the sun, watched his troops as they prepared for their departure from the island.

Captain Aaron Reaping floated up and saluted. *"Admiral, Stephanie and the other secretaries have been included in the flight plan for the Thirteenth Infantry as you requested. They're a bit nervous, though. None of them have left the island before."*

The admiral nodded to his friend and laughed. *"I seem to recall we felt the same way when we left for Moscow back in 1812. They'll be fine, just make sure they're looked after."*

Aaron laughed as well, nodded, and floated off. Stretched out in front of Esdras, the five ranks of his fleet stood waiting to get under way. The 778th Engineer Division would join them in a week to begin plotting and constructing the small base that would be their home. And once that base was completed, the civilian families would be able to move into their quarters. Until that time, the military Dementors would occupy the command bunker that had been built the year before near the lake. It would be a tight fit, but they would tough it out.

Each Dementor assembled was loaded with a small satchel that contained both personal effects and equipment, all reduced to fit in the small pack. Together, they carried enough provisions and equipment to stock both the base and bunker. When all of his captains had reported their readiness, Esdras stepped up and drew the Glaive of Silence from his sleeve. The mild chatter reduced immediately to absolute silence on the windswept plain of Azkaban.

He watched his troops carefully for a moment before speaking. *"Each one of you is here for a reason. You have been hand selected to serve with me and help prove to the mortals that we Dementors are more than what they've been taught to fear. Our mission is to capture their escaped prisoner, protect them, and to protect their children who attend Hogwarts. This year, our task will take on added importance as Hogwarts hosts the return of the Triwizard Tournament. We have been asked by the Ministry of Magic to assist, and we will do so gladly. Keep the peace and remember the laws, and your honor."*

His speech complete, he sheathed the glaive within his sleeve and rose into the air. *"Azkaban Guard Fourth Fleet, take flight!"* He was rewarded with over one hundred and fifty Dementors rising into the air. Esdras turned as they ascended and faced to the southwest. *"Afterburners until we're over Scotland. Maintain formation as best as possible through the crosswinds and we'll regroup near Inverness. Understood?"*

Five voices, the captains, called out replies in the affirmative. Aaron Reaping gave the most original. *"We've done this before, sir."*

Admiral Esdras Tarsus Demnin laughed. They were now five hundred feet in the air and had a straight shot towards the British Isles. "*Fourth Fleet, engage afterburners!*"

The screeching roar of the combined afterburners echoed over the island long after the Dementors were gone.

Chapter 4 – Town of Prophecy

Another fortnight saw the construction of the Dementor base begin. What was once merely a hillside a few miles from Hogsmeade and Hogwarts slowly became a small city fit for a Dementor. The engineers of the 778th Engineer Division were hard workers and were making excellent progress. Already, the main shaft of the town had been dug, extending four hundred feet into the bedrock, and radial arms to contain residences and services would be built within the next week. After that, it would simply be a matter of building the individual homes, stores, and offices. So was the report that the master architect, Commander Valerie Rook, gave to the hovering form of Admiral Esdras Demnin.

The admiral nodded. *“Then we’re on schedule to complete this project within the month allotted?”*

The commander was smooth and confident and bowed to the flag officer. *“Yes, Lord Admiral, with any luck, we’ll finish a few days ahead of schedule.”*

Esdras narrowed the rim of his hood at the commander. *“Rook, I appreciate the sentiment, but please remember that I am no one’s lord.”*

Valerie bowed deeply. *“As you will, sir.”*

The admiral nodded and scanned over the report in his hands. *“Excellent. Please keep me apprised of your progress and continue to follow the construction plan as we laid out. Let me know if there are any major deviations.”*

The commander snapped into a salute. *“Yes, sir.”*

Esdras turned and floated up towards the entranceway to the as yet unnamed Dementor base. Waiting for him at the entry cave was the freshly promoted full Lieutenant Stephanie Trieste. The admiral sighed and brushed some of the dust off of his cloaks. *“What’s next?”*

The secretary consulted the admiral’s schedule and tapped at the next event. *“You have a meeting with the Hogsmeade Business and*

Residents Associations. They've expressed concerns about having over three hundred Dementors living within floating distance of their town."

The admiral sighed and rubbed his featureless face. *"Nearly one hundred twenty wasn't a concern when Sirius Black was around, now three hundred are when he isn't? I'll never understand the mortal mind."* He shrugged. *"Well, let's get going. We'll have to make a good first impression on them."*

Stephanie bowed a little. *"Actually, Lord Admiral, you will have to go on your own. Commander DeCay has agreed to teach me English and we have a lesson in a short while. Captain Reaping will meet you there, so unless the Lord Admiral requires me...?"*

Esdras waved her concerns aside. *"No, Trieste, go to your lesson. More of us need to know English if we're going to be surrounded by mortals. I can handle this. Besides, last year I was in most of those shops and no one said a word. You are dismissed. I'll meet you at the bunker after the meeting."* He returned her salute and watched her float off across the lake towards the bunker before calling out after her. *"And don't call me Lord Admiral!"*

Taking off as well, and turning to follow the lake towards the town of Hogsmeade, Esdras was joined in midair by Aaron Reaping. The new captain of the Thirteenth Infantry saluted lazily, which Esdras returned just as easily. Aaron glided along with him in silence for a few moments before addressing him in English. "Are you ready for the meeting with the mortals?"

The admiral nodded. "So long as there are no pitchforks and torches, I think we'll be okay."

The captain shook his head slowly and laughed. "I don't think it'll be that bad. We are Dementors after all; they'll need more than pitchforks to get us out." In the comfortable silence, Aaron changed the subject idly. "Malachi is teaching English to Stephanie Trieste."

Esdras nodded, doing a slow barrel roll over the calm waters. "She told me. I wonder if that means anything."

Aaron shrugged. "I don't think so. You know how Malachi is. He swore that he would never settle down and for the last century or so, he's done a pretty good job. He's dated profusely, I got married, and you..."

The admiral began to descend towards the town below him. "And I don't talk about my love life."

The captain chuckled softly. "Yes, sir."

They floated calmly along the High Street until they came to the front of the Three Broomsticks. Esdras sighed and looked around before turning to his friend. "Animagus spell or not?"

Aaron sighed and scratched his hood. "Stick with who you are, that's who they want to talk to."

Esdras nodded and opened the door, floating into the pub with Aaron right behind him. The pub, which usually did a good business, was packed for this meeting. Every table was filled with mortals, either residents or businessmen, and in many cases, both at the same time. The Dementors floated up to the bar, placed an order, and, with firewhiskeys in hand, turned to face their accusers.

Esdras scanned the crowd and nodded slowly. "If we're all here, we can begin. I am Admiral Esdras Demnin and this is Captain Aaron Reaping. We're Dementors. As you all know, we're building a small settlement nearby. It's nothing big, just a place for the families to live while we are on assignment here at Hogsmeade. Family is very important to us Dementors. We're prepared to answer any questions you might have about your new neighbors."

A singularly angry voice was heard from the back of the room, belonging to a wizard with a long brown beard. "We don't want any new neighbors, especially not your kind!"

The hoods of both Dementors rose nervously as they looked at each other. Esdras whispered quietly to Aaron. "*Pitchforks.*" He then turned to his accuser and spoke in plain English. "Believe it or not, Dementors can be a valuable asset to any mortal community. We are a strong protective force and loyal to our friends. We also require

goods and services that only mortals can provide, which would increase revenue for your town. Likewise, we have goods and services that are available nowhere else in the world, except Azkaban. It would be a mutually beneficial relationship.”

A scared female voice rose up from the murmur of the crowd. “Beneficial if you don’t eat our souls.”

At this point, Madame Rosemerta spoke up from her position behind the bar. “Now come on all of you. Be reasonable. I can count on one hand the people in this room who haven’t been in this very room with Esdras and not said a word. No one said a thing about him when he was in town during the school year.”

The angry wizard spoke up again. “I’ve never met this Dementor in my life.”

With a flutter of robes, a teenager with tousled blonde hair and glowing green eyes appeared where the Dementor once stood. Esdras smiled brightly. “You’re the quillsmith at Scrivenshaft’s, aren’t you? You do excellent work.”

The wizard sputtered for a second and was saved from a response by the fireplace behind him roaring to life. Rosemerta called over the crowd to the person who stood brushing ash off her pants. “I’m sorry; we’re closed for a business meeting. You’ll have to come back in an hour or so.”

The girl in the fireplace didn’t hear a word, and she grinned madly when she saw the Dementors. “Esdras! I wanted to surprise you at the command bunker.”

Esdras smiled with barely hidden relief as she weaved her way through the crowd and hugged him tightly. Her lips found his and the room erupted in gasps at the sight of a beautiful mortal girl locked in a kiss with a Dementor. The pair enjoyed causing a commotion but a subtle cough from Aaron finally made Esdras relent. “Hello, Katie. We’ve got a bit of a meeting going on here. I’m trying to explain why we won’t be any trouble to the town.”

Katie lifted herself up onto a barstool and smiled, taking it upon herself to address the crowd. "That's easy, Dementors are a wonderful lot. Strong, brave, passionate, friendly, helpful, everything you'd ever want in a friend or neighbor. You really shouldn't put too much stock on those ministry pamphlets; they're really nothing but bollocks."

Aaron had the misfortune of taking a drink of his firewhiskey at this time and, at this comment, sprayed a fine mist of beverage which caught fire in midair. Esdras retook his Dementor form and thumped him hard on the back a few times until he stopped coughing. That crisis taken care of, the admiral cleared his throat and looked out over the mortals again. "Let's begin discussing your fears in a reasonable manner. Hopefully we can prove that Katie's statement is accurate."

The last three weeks on the build project passed without major incident. There were, as always, minor injuries to members of the construction details, a severed limb here, crush wounds from falling rocks there, but nothing out of the ordinary. But now, in the great square of the town, three military divisions, a research division, a medical division, and a secretarial division stood to face an engineering division in the handover ceremony that would formally make the town ready for occupation by civilian Dementors.

It was with great pleasure that, once again, Commander Valerie Rook stood before Admiral Esdras Demnin. Her voice was clear and calm as she made her final report. *"Admiral, the last of the finishing crews has cleared the base. All safety checks and tests have been performed. The proper ceremonies to honor the gods have been performed. All is as it must be; all is as it should be. This base...this town...is ready for habitation by any who may wish to call it home. The only thing left to give it is a name."*

Esdras looked around the massive structure, carved from the living rock and illuminated with fire emeralds imported from the island. It looked exactly like an Azkaban town. *"I waive my right to name this place. You and your division have done exceptional work. I believe that the naming of this settlement should fall to the master architect. What will you name this place, Valerie?"*

The commander gasped and looked behind her to her division. They stood at rigid attention before the admiral, but it was obvious that they were pleased that their commanding officer had been given such a grand gift. When the engineer again turned to face the admiral, it was obvious that she had made up her mind. *"My Lord, I name this town New Demnin."*

Esdras tensed at this and looked with surprise at the young engineer. *"Why on earth do you want to name this town New Demnin?"*

Valerie looked into his hood and Esdras gasped. Hidden in the darkness of her hood, of the hoods of her entire division, and in the hoods of all the Dementors in that artificially created cave, was an emotion that scared him: utter, total loyalty. The commander slowly lowered herself to kneel and was followed by every other Dementor. *"I name this town New Demnin to honor my Lord Admiral. A thousand blessings upon the royal house."*

The statement was repeated by the remaining one hundred eighty Dementors. Esdras spun slowly about, taking in the sight of rank upon rank of kneeling figures surrounding him. His voice was a whisper when he spoke. *"And a thousand blessings be upon these loyal houses."* He rose into the air, his voice shaky. *"The name of this town is thusly settled, we are the first residents of New Demnin. You are all dismissed. Reaping, with me, now."*

The assembled forces rose and snapped to attention as their commanding officer rocketed up to the exit of the cave followed at a short distance by Aaron. The captain followed the admiral up until they were high in the air, coming to rest behind a cumulus cloud. Aaron waited for a moment for his friend to speak. When nothing was forthcoming, he spoke softly. *"The Lord Admiral wished to see me, sir?"*

Esdras whipped around and glared at Aaron. *"What the hell just happened down there? Do they not get it? I am not a god, I am not a lord. I am just an admiral!"*

Aaron's voice remained soft and calm. *"No, my friend, to them you are so much more. Now more than ever, you are. You know the*

prophecy of the Oracle as well as anyone else, probably better. You have to admit that you are doing a fairly good job of fulfilling it."

Shaking his head, Esdras sighed and spoke in a disdainful voice. *"Is that what all this is about? Some stupid prophecy made a thousand years ago? If it hasn't been fulfilled by now, it's not going to be fulfilled!"*

"But Esdras, the probability of it being fulfilled rises every day that it isn't."

The admiral growled. *"Damned it, Aaron, whose side are you on?"*

The captain bowed. *"I am loyal to my Lord Esdras of the royal house of Demnin, and no one else."*

"That's not what I asked, and you know it."

Aaron rose up and sighed. *"Esdras, recite the prophecy."*

Esdras sputtered for a second, looked at his friend angrily, but finally relented. *"In the time to pass, when the children of Azkaban have lost their hope, a savior will emerge, born from the house of the fallen king. And beside the mortals, this god of death will lead us to stand, an army and a town to his name. This shall be a sign unto you, heed it well. For at the bounds of life and death, the god of death gains power, a boundary he shall only find in mortal's darkest hour."*

Aaron took his shoulders and looked him in the hood. *"You are born from the house of the fallen king. With the way things are going you will soon have us standing beside the mortals. You have an army, and now a town, to your name. To all those Dementors down there, to the Dementors stationed on Azkaban and abroad, you are their savior. My gods, man, even the house of Sanguis believes. That incident with Tarquin last year steeled their faith."*

Esdras sighed and turned to face the horizon. *"And no member of the house of Sanguis has expressed any sort of faith in the gods of the ancients in over five hundred years, I know."* He growled again and rounded on his friend. *"But I didn't ask for this, Aaron."*

Aaron put a hand on his friend's shoulder and squeezed tight. "No, *you didn't. And there is no telling if you are the one or not. You are still my friend, and that will never change. But you need to realize that like it or not, you've become more to our people than just an admiral.*" He brought his hand down and sighed. "*You'll be leaving tomorrow for Katie's?*"

Esdras nodded, his mood quickly improving. "Yes, *tomorrow evening; and I'll be back the next night.*"

The captain shook his head slowly. "*May I suggest that the Lord Admiral take a week to spend with his beloved before the start of the term? We can handle the influx of families just fine without you, and no one will blame you for wanting to be with your loved one, either.*"

The admiral laughed and put an arm over his friend's shoulder as they descended through the cloud cover. "*You know, right now that doesn't sound like a bad idea.*"

Chapter 5 –World Quidditch Cup

The bed in the guest bedroom at Bellmont was inordinately comfortable. Even Hogwarts, which seemed to pride itself on providing exceptional sleeping accommodations to its students, couldn't hold a candle to that bed. And at this moment, it belonged entirely to Esdras, who had arrived the day before. Katie had been thrilled that his plans had changed to allow for a whole week and the Bells had gladly agreed to allow him to stay. The Dementor was quickly becoming like a second son to them. And at this moment, he was resting comfortably in his natural form on the magically lengthened bed.

Esdras immediately woke up when he felt the pressure on his waist. Dementors being notoriously light sleepers, it was no surprise that the weight on his waist was more than enough to get his attention. It was the smell, though, that reined him in and made him lay peacefully. He smelled Katie. He waited a moment to see if she would do anything and when she didn't, he spoke. "May I help you?"

Her voice held boundless eagerness and enthusiasm. "Quidditch." The Dementor laughed quietly and illuminated his eyes. Katie gasped as a bright flash of silver filled the empty sockets of his eyes and disappeared. "What was that?"

Sitting up and rubbing his eyes, Esdras stretched a bit before answering. "The best explanation would be that that was me opening my eyes. Since we have no way to shut our eyes, we turn off our eyes at night so we can sleep."

The mortal form before him glowed brightly and leaned in closer and captured his circular mouth in a soft kiss. "You look very handsome when you first wake up."

The Dementor groaned and fell back, covering his face with his shroud. "Please, I look like a corpse, I need a shower, and I haven't brushed my teeth. I'm amazed you can even look at me in this form when I'm presentable, let alone now."

Katie thumped him on the chest and laughed. "Well I wouldn't even be in here looking at you except I couldn't sit still. Now get up and get

your shower and brush your teeth and get dressed. The match is in twelve hours.”

Esdras looked over her shoulder to the clock on the wall and then looked incredulously at the mortal straddling his waist. “Are you mental? We don’t have to be ready for hours since I’m Apparating us in. Let the immortal rest!”

The mortal smirked. “Provisionally immortal. And I couldn’t sleep so why should you? Besides, breakfast is ready and wouldn’t you rather spend time with me than in bed?”

Beneath her, Esdras changed forms, going from pallid Dementor to glowing eyed mortal in seconds. He smiled and put on a thoughtful look before the Dementor grasped her lightly by the shirt and pulled her down beside him. “Why not both?”

The mortal and Dementor pair stood on the porch of Bellmont. Katie’s parents sat near them on the porch swing, confirming the plans of the two young Quidditch fans. Mr. Bell looked downright envious of his daughter and her boyfriend. “So when should we expect you two back?”

Esdras rummaged through his bookbag, pushing aside some hoodies to make sure he had the two tickets before turning to face the elder Bell. “No telling how long the match will last, but we’ll leave immediately afterwards. I’ll be Apparating us back here. I love camping out as much as the next Dementor but there’s no charm in sharing a site with tens of thousands.” He made a confused face as he pulled out a box of green mint tea bags from his bag. “So that’s where I put those things.”

Katie pulled the box from his hand and put it back in the bag. “No, that’s where I put those things so you’ll know where they are.” She brushed away his hands and zipped up the pack, before shouldering it. “Do we have everything?”

Glowing green eyes blinked in stunned silence for a moment before the Dementor nodded. Mrs. Bell tried her best to hide her smile. “Well then, you two have fun. Esdras, you be careful Apparating.”

Esdras had already taken Katie's hand and was leading her out into the front yard. "Yes, Mrs. Bell. We'll see you sometime tonight if the game finishes by then." The pair waved to the adults, then the Dementor wrapped his arms around Katie and Disapparated them with a double pop.

The feeling of being pulled through a straw was unfamiliar to Katie and when they emerged on the other side, she shook her head. She let out a startled squeak when she realized there was no ground beneath their feet. "Esdras, how high up are we?"

The Dementor looked idly down and shrugged. "Five, maybe six thousand feet. Trust me; the view will be worth it."

He shifted her around until she was on his back, arms tight around his neck, before beginning the descent. Katie peered over his shoulder at the approaching ground, her hair being whipped wildly behind her head. Even from this height, she could pick out the huge area of the brightly illuminated stadium and the massive tent city that had formed nearby. She tightened her grip on her ride. "Good idea not camping. That doesn't look particularly cozy."

Esdras nodded and continued the downward float. At around one thousand feet they could begin to pick out the staggering mass of humanity milling towards the stadium. The Dementor adjusted their glide path to set them down near the stadium side of the forest and looked back to his mortal passenger. "I think we're going to have to have quite a hike once we set down."

Katie smiled madly, her eyes never leaving the stadium. "But it's Quidditch!"

Their descent increased perceptibly and the Dementor's voice took on an excited tone. "It is, isn't it?"

After the fiftieth flight of stairs, Esdras had decided that the Top Box was more than adequately named. Even Katie, whose perpetual enthusiasm for all things Quidditch was not abated, was looking a little flushed. The Dementor would have floated them up, but there was such a multitude of scaffolding and people that it would have

been even harder than walking. Finally, the pair came to their destination, and opened the door to the lushly accommodated room.

Their relief was disrupted when Esdras screamed and covered his eyes, rubbing them fiercely. He staggered blindly around to face the door from which they came. When Katie turned to face him, she almost screamed herself. His normally brilliant green eyes were bloodshot with a hideous glowing black. Esdras blinked a few times before speaking, his eyes unable to focus on her. "Katie, is there a house elf sitting over in the corner there?"

Katie tore her attention away from his eyes and looked over to the corner he indicated and nodded. "Yes, why? What just happened?"

Esdras kept his back to the house elf and held his hands out to Katie. "Guide me to our seats. House elves have powerful magic. They overload Dementor vision, like a mortal looking at the sun." He laughed wryly. "There could be a Death Eater sitting beside that house elf and I'd never know."

The mortal took his hands and watched as his eyes glowed bright silver as the ichor began to heal them. She walked him backwards slowly and voiced a thought. "Esdras, why don't you just shut off your Dementor vision?"

The Dementor pondered this for a minute before his eyes stopped glowing silver. After a second, they stopped glowing green as well, revealing his bottle green mortal eye color. He made to turn around, but hesitated for a second. "There's no telling if this will work or not." With that, he quickly spun around and became the first Dementor ever to see a house elf. He blinked a few times. "All that magic in that little thing? You've got to be kidding me!"

Katie smiled and put an arm around his waist just as the door opened again. She let out a cheer at the group that stood in the doorway. "Esdras, look, I don't believe it!"

Before he could ask what she couldn't believe, Katie was already running across the box to the entourage of redheads and associates who had just entered. The Dementor laughed softly and glided quietly

behind Katie. "A Bell, some Weasleys, a Granger, a Potter, and a lone Ravenclaw Demnin. I feel out of place."

The assembled Gryffindors laughed at this and Hermione stepped forward, wrapping an arm around Esdras. "*Quite the opposite, no one would be more welcome.*"

Esdras let out a low whistle. "*Very impressive, Hermione. You've improved much over the summer. You may well yet become the third mortal in the world fluent in Azkabaaner.*"

Hermione looked wide eyed at him. "*There are only two? Who are they?*"

Katie nudged the younger witch and smiled. "*Headmaster Dumbledore and myself.*"

The assembled group took up their seats, which were thankfully close together, and awaited the start of the match. Esdras, after catching Katie's covetous glances at Harry's Omnioculars, excused himself before jumping from the window and gliding over the top of the stadium. He returned after ten minutes with two pair and handed one off to Katie. "I can't believe we missed the stand that was selling these."

Katie smiled gratefully and took the offered gift before giving Esdras a gentle kiss. "Well, I was a little eager to get to the box."

Esdras leaned back in his seat. "That's a bit of an understatement."

Their conversation was interrupted by a pair of identical redheads popping up from behind them. "If you two are going to spend the whole match snogging, we'll gladly take your seats."

Katie closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose. "Fred, the match hasn't started yet, and you'll get these seats over my dead body."

A malevolent drawl piped up from the back of the room, where the door had opened just seconds before. "Is that an offer, Bell?"

Heads spun at that remark, and Esdras could hear his fellow schoolmates whispering the name of the speaker as if it were a curse. Esdras sighed and turned around, idly addressing Draco Malfoy. "Last year's promise still stands."

The young Malfoy blanched at the resurrection of the year old threat about the end of his lineage and retreated towards his parents. Katie smirked and leaned against Esdras' shoulder. "What a coward."

Esdras' mortal eyes narrowed wickedly as he stood up. "You haven't seen anything yet." He walked across the room and smiled broadly. "Tau phi 770, cloaks of the ancients, how many years has it been now? Too many, we miss you back home."

Lucius Malfoy startled at the mention of his Azkaban prisoner number and he glanced nervously around the room. "I don't know what you're talking about. Who are you? We've never met before, now go away."

The Dementor merely smiled as he withdrew his animagus form, the top of his hooded head brushing the ceiling. "Oh, you only wish we had never met before, tau phi 770." He leaned in close, sending both Malfoy males scuttling for protection behind their matriarch. His voice was calm and playful. "Keep yourselves in line. We've still got a cell for you back home."

The remaining occupants of the top box arrived in short order. The Dementor found himself surrounded by various dignitaries, including Ludo Bagman and Cornelius Fudge. Esdras had managed to avoid Bagman's constant attempts at entering into his betting pool by engaging in a supremely disappointing conversation with the Minister of Magic about a series of proposed amendments to the Treaty of Edinburgh. After realizing he was all but talking to a brick wall, he huffed slightly and floated back to Katie. "With people like him at the helm, it's a miracle the mortal world hasn't self destructed by now."

Katie sighed and put her head on his shoulder, leaning in close. "There are good people in positions of power. Besides, not all of us can have such noble royalty as the house of Demnin."

Esdras rolled his eyes. "Flattery will get you nowhere."

Their attention was diverted as the topic of their conversation moved to address the entire stadium. Katie had to hold back her laughter as Esdras made a talking motion with his hand as the minister spoke his peace. Finally, the evening's commentator, Ludo Bagman, was called upon, and the match began with much fanfare and cheering.

The teams and their mascots were introduced. Ireland and their leprechauns would be pitted against Bulgaria and their Veela. The Veela did their little song and dance as the Bulgarian team flew about and Katie looked down the line at her friends. Harry and Ron both seemed to be enraptured by the platinum blonde creatures on the field. Esdras, however, was still looking through his program. Katie nudged him slightly. "Look, Esdras, there are Veela."

The Dementor looked down to the sidelines of the pitch, then over to his left, where the other men all sat entranced. He smiled wryly. "I don't hear them the same way that you mortals do. And believe me, they're not as pretty as they'd have you believe."

The match began and soon there was an unholy storm of broomsticks over the pitch. Ireland took the Quaffle and Esdras tensed, watching the chaser weave through the air towards the hoops. When he shot and scored, Esdras cheered loudly and pulled out the small flag which he had charmed to read, in Azkabaaner, "*Island nations stick together.*"

The match kept everyone on their toes. And with Ireland inching their way up the scoreboard, the Bulgarian team and fans were starting to get more and more irate. It was only a matter of time before the inevitable happened. Esdras tapped Katie on the shoulder and pointed down to the Bulgarian sidelines where the irate team of Veela mascots was starting to shout angrily at the team. After another score by the Ireland chasers, the Veela broke free from their skins, taking on a more demonic feel, complete with avian styled head. Esdras leaned back and smiled. "Back in the thirties, Aaron and I used to go around pissing Veela off just to see that happen, but then he got married and settled down."

Katie stared wide eyed at the sight before her. "That's terrifying. Why aren't those things restricted by a treaty?"

Esdras shrugged. "They look good ninety nine percent of the time; we look good maybe one percent. You do the math."

Ron, who had been sitting beside Esdras and noticed the Veela's display himself, turned to join the conversation. "I imagine the whole soul sucking part has something to do with it, too, right?"

The Dementor looked blankly at the redheaded mortal before Hermione turned him to face the match again. She chided him harshly. "Honestly, Ron, you need to think before you say these things."

Any reply from any party was lost as the two seekers initiated a dive in the middle of the pitch. Katie and Esdras flew to the rail, their eyes trained on the action. Esdras even risked reopening his Dementor eyes, the piercing green glow following the action as it unfolded. Viktor Krum, the Bulgarian seeker, performed a perfect Wronski Feint, causing the Irish seeker to slam into the ground. Within minutes, the match was over, the Snitch held tightly in the Bulgarian's hand. However, a quick look at the scoreboard revealed a surprise. Esdras smiled. "Ireland won! I won five galleons in the Azkaban pool!"

Katie laughed happily and wrapped her arms around him as the cheering in the Top Box swelled. "What are you going to do with it?"

Esdras smiled and waved his flag some more. "Simple, I'm going to use it to buy my girlfriend something nice."

The excitement surrounding the Irish victory never really died down, but simply transferred over to the tent city. Esdras and Katie had been persuaded by the Weasleys to join them for a late dinner and were currently sitting around a roaring purple fire in front of the spacious tents. The Dementor finished his tea and set his cup down before rising and stretching. He turned to address Mr. Weasley. "Well, I must thank you for an excellent meal, but I promised the Bells that I would have Katie back after the match."

Katie, noticing Esdras pulling out his hoodie from their bookbag, rose from her seat and accepted her sweatshirt, as well. "I suppose Esdras is right. Thank you very much for your hospitality."

The pair slipped into the tent and said their goodbyes to everyone. When they emerged, Mr. Weasley rose and extended a hand to Esdras. "Really, you don't have to go, there's more than enough room in the tent to sleep two more."

Esdras shook hands after he had slipped into his sweatshirt and shook his head slowly. "Thank you for the offer, sir, but I did make a promise to Katie's parents. Besides, I doubt anyone will be getting much sleep tonight with all the celebrating going on."

As if on cue, a series of fireworks erupted from a nearby tent, causing a small commotion as people rushed to put out the flaming tarp. Mr. Weasley nodded. "I see what you mean. Well, a pleasure to finally meet you, Esdras. Katie, it's good to see you again."

Katie smiled and shook Mr. Weasley's hand before turning to face Esdras, wrapping her arms around his waist. She held him close as they disappeared into the night with a soft double pop.

Chapter 6 – The Aftermath

Katie rolled around in her bed and stretched lazily. A quick glance at the clock revealed it to be nearly lunchtime. Not surprising, all the walking up and down stairs at the stadium yesterday had worn her out. Slipping out of bed and putting on a robe, she made her way into the hall and over to the guest bedroom. The door was open and the room deserted. Esdras was up before her.

She shrugged and continued down the hall and down the stairs. Her mother met her at the foot of the stairs with an anxious look. She took a deep breath. "Katie, Esdras didn't want to disturb you so he told me to give you this when you woke up."

In the Bell matriarch's hands sat a letter and the morning's copy of the Daily Prophet. Katie paused only to read the headline, "Death Eaters Attack Quidditch Cup," and quickly grabbed both the paper and the letter. She opened the letter and found a single sheet with hastily scrawled Azkabaaner script on it.

"Katie, by now you have seen the newspaper. I've been recalled by emergency vulture and will be briefed by Minister Fudge. I don't know how long the briefing will last but I didn't want you to worry about me if you woke up to find me not here. I'll send Constance with a message when I know better what's going on. Until then, you are always in my heart. Esdras."

Katie and her mother moved into the living room. They sat on the sofa for a silent moment before Elizabeth quietly spoke to her daughter. "I don't know about you, but I feel a little bit safer knowing that Esdras is out there dealing with the situation."

The words were truly glowing praise for the Dementor, and Katie leaned into her mother, falling into her embrace. She smiled slightly, still holding the letter tightly in her hand. "So do I. But he has such a dangerous job, sometimes it scares me."

Elizabeth nodded and leaned back into the couch with her daughter. "Yes, I suppose being an Azkaban guard is dangerous, but lots of other people have dangerous jobs. Aurors, dragon wranglers, those jobs aren't exactly safe, either. And remember that he is immortal."

She smiled and looked at her daughter. "And I don't think he'd be happy with any other job, especially not now. You should have seen the fire in his eyes this morning. Now that he has people to care about..."

Katie blushed and decided it would be best to change the subject. "Was there any other mail today?"

Elizabeth smiled and nodded to save her daughter further embarrassment. She took two letters off the end table and handed them to Katie. "Yes, dear. Your Hogwarts letter came today, as did Esdras'. You can't put anything past Dumbledore, can you?"

Katie smiled and shook her head before opening her letter. Her happiness quickly turned to confusion as she scanned the required items for the year. "Dress robes? What on earth will we need dress robes for?"

Constance had eventually arrived, the graceful vulture carrying a single, hastily written note saying not to expect the Dementor anytime soon. So it was to everyone's surprise when, just after dinner, the door to Belmont swung open and slammed shut, rattling the windows. Katie rushed from the living room to see a positively livid, nine foot tall Dementor standing in the hallway. His hood was narrowed almost to the point of closing completely, and he was quivering with barely contained rage. Katie, for once, didn't rush towards him. Instead, she merely called out in a calm voice. "Esdras, what happened?"

Esdras took a deep, rattling breath and looked to her, struggling to calm down. His voice was harsher than even his native Azkabaaner accent should have allowed. "Never in all my life have I wanted to violate the Treaty of Edinburgh like I have today. I can't believe those idiots!"

Katie came forward and gathered him up in a hug. She let out a sigh of relief as she felt him shrink into his mortal form, a sign that he was starting to calm down. She whispered softly to him once he was fully transformed. "Come on, let's get you some dinner and you can tell me all about it."

Esdras nodded and followed her into the dining room. Before long, he was sitting in front of a plate of ham and potatoes, and the Bells had gathered to hear his tale. He was slow in starting, but quickly gathered speed. "Well, I went to the Ministry and met with the minister. Dumbledore was there and we tried our best to convince Fudge to let one of my Divisions aid in their search. I've got three military divisions just sitting around, waiting for something to do. But he refused, something about how the Department of International Magical Cooperation didn't want to be sending sorties into other nations without their knowledge."

Katie's brother Eric raised an eyebrow at this. "Why would International Magical Cooperation be involved in this?"

Esdras sighed. "That's the thing; apparently this isn't just a British issue. There have been reports of Death Eater activity in other countries as well. But at least Dumbledore and I were able to convince them to put more aurors on the case than they had originally planned. Still, ten aurors just aren't enough."

Katie reached across the table and patted his hand. "You did the best you could, Esdras."

Esdras made a fist and growled. "But it's not my best. My best would be getting out there and hunting them down like the animals they are. If the Ministry would just trust my kind, let us do the job they want us to do, there wouldn't be these problems." He sighed and put his head in his hands, the weight of a nation weighing down his voice. "We're just a means to an end to them. Nothing more than tools."

Esdras wasn't surprised to feel a set of mortal arms wrapping around him, Katie's hug definitely calmed him down. What did surprise him was the second hug from Katie's mother, and the reassuring pats on his shoulders from Eric and Mr. Bell. It was comforting to know that these mortals cared for him, that there was still hope for his people. Already worn down from an emotional day, Esdras sighed and leaned into the various embraces.

Diagon Alley, as always, was bursting at the seams with human traffic and the commerce of the wizarding world. But the inside Madame

Malkin's Robes for All Occasions was an entirely different world of hurt as the majority of the four Hogwarts houses descended upon the store to buy dress robes. Esdras, due to his military nature, would be relying on the mess dress uniform of the Azkaban Guard, the Azkaban equivalent of mortal white tie formalwear. That particular uniform was currently packed away, and he refused to give Katie any hints as to what it looked like.

She, in return, had groused to him about the unfairness of the situation and kicked him out of the shop while she picked her robe. Thus, Esdras floated next door to Flourish and Blotts to get his books. He hummed a happy song as he did. As he glided through the aisles, he picked up books for both himself and Katie. He had just grabbed two copies of the Standard Book of Spells, Grade Five, when a small redheaded form ran into him and promptly fell to the floor. Esdras looked down. "*Ginevra mashavades Weasley, fancy meeting you here.*"

Ginny looked up in surprise, but quickly found a smile for the Dementor. "*Esdras corvades Demnin, the pleasure is mine.*"

The Dementor offered her a hand up and settled onto the ground, gathering up the books she spilt on the ground with a quick flick of his wand. "Shopping alone today?"

The mortal shook her head and pulled the grade three spell book from the shelf. "No such luck, I'm afraid. Mum is trying to corral Fred and George into Madame Malkin's." She looked slyly at him. "An important Dementor such as yourself wouldn't happen to know why we would need dress robes this year, would you?"

Esdras nodded slowly, and quickly took up a sly smirk. "I do, and you're not getting it out of me. Katie couldn't, so you have no chance whatsoever."

Ginny successfully pulled off the most angelic look that Esdras had ever seen short of the frescos in a mortal cathedral. She stepped in closer and smiled. "I wouldn't tell a soul, Esdras. I promise."

The Dementor blinked, and was saved from a response by Katie stepping into the aisle behind him. She drew her wand and called out

in a mock angered voice. “You, Weasley, step away from my Dementor.”

Ginny looked around Esdras and smiled. “I was trying to get him to tell us why we need dress robes.”

At this, Katie put her wand back in her pocket and smiled. “Then by all means, carry on.”

Esdras only groaned and prepared to float into the rafters. They both held onto the hem of his robe and pulled him back. Ginny’s face became suddenly serious. “In all honesty, Esdras, I was wondering if you knew anything about what’s going on with...well...things these days. Dad has been pretty nervous and tight lipped about everything.”

Esdras sighed heavily. “Honestly, it’s a mess, but I don’t think it’s bad. I mean, it’s not like Voldemort is back in power or anything.” He ignored their winces at the unspeakable name and shrugged. “The Ministry just hasn’t been utilizing their resources as best as they could. My troops have been floating around Hogsmeade in preparatory patrols for when school starts. Sure there’s the occasional Sirius Black sighting, but those sorties are only for a day or two. It’s all because they don’t trust us, not enough to give us the really big assignments, at least. Maybe someday...”

Katie took his hand and Ginny smiled up at him. “I trust you, Esdras. And I want to visit this Dementor town of yours.” At his surprised look, she continued. “Oh yes, there have been articles in the Daily Prophet and advertisements, too. I need a good cloak, and no one knows cloaks better than Dementors.”

Esdras had returned back to New Demnin for a few days after his week of vacation. The settlement positively bustled with new residents and businesses. It was certainly a far cry from the cramped quarters of the military command bunker on the other side of the lake. Some shopkeepers had even put in orders for clearance to begin constructing a few small buildings at the cave entrance so that any mortal customers wouldn’t be intimidated. The admiral thought the shopkeepers were being overly optimistic, but nonetheless agreed.

So it was that Esdras woke up early on the morning of the sixty first of Seshaldes, showered, dressed, and picked up his footlocker, and then Apparated to London to stand on Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. This time around, he was truly excited, no hiding, no secrets, just a Dementor going to school, and he had friends. He hadn't even been standing on the platform for five seconds before Cho barreled into him. "Esdras! You ready for another year?"

The Dementor grinned happily and slung an arm around his friend. "Bring it on. Compared to fleet command, this will be a piece of cake."

The pair walked to the train, carrying their trunks behind them and greeting all those that they knew. Esdras, though, continued to crane his neck around. Cho smirked and leaned against him. "She'll be along, don't you worry." Sure enough, it was only a matter of moments before Katie and her parents pushed through the barrier. Esdras caught sight of her instantly and Cho let him go. "Go on, then. I'll catch up with you later."

Gliding quickly across the platform, the Dementor and the mortal met in the middle. Katie's chocolate brown eyes shined as she stared up at him. "I know it was only a few days, but it was a few days too long."

The Dementor lifted her up, laughing and spinning them in a tight circle. "I couldn't have said it better myself."

The proper goodbyes were made and Esdras stepped back politely to allow Katie some privacy with her parents. He was surprised, however, when Mrs. Bell stepped forward and drew him into a tight hug. "You stay safe now, Esdras. I know you'll be doing more than just studying this year, so remember to stay balanced."

Esdras returned the hug, altogether pleased and surprised by the emotion showed by the Bell family towards him. "Yes, ma'am. I will remember. Besides, I have almost one hundred dedicated guardsmen, I will not be alone."

Elizabeth Bell smiled and took his hand as the whistle of the Hogwarts Express blew. Esdras and Katie both stepped back and made their final goodbyes before turning to rush towards the train.

When they were settled in their cabin, opposite Alicia and Angelina, Katie turned to face him. "Well, here we go."

Chapter 7 – Constant Vigilance

The sorting ceremony went smoothly, the new crop of Ravenclaws looked promising, though Esdras was quick to remind his friends that they, along with all the other first years, would need to get used to a Dementor in their ranks. As it was, they would occasionally cast curious glances at the student with glowing eyes. Esdras smirked as Cho brought up an important question. “So, since Professor Lupin resigned, who do you think the new Defense professor will be?”

The Dementor smiled full out. “Oh, the new Defense professor is good. Don’t you dare worry about that.”

Cho looked shocked. “Damned it, Esdras, is there anything happening here that you don’t know about?”

Esdras shrugged. “Dumbledore has been very open about his plans. He believes that the more the Fourth Fleet knows, the better we’ll be able to do our job. So far, it’s definitely worked out.” He scanned the High Table and looked confused. “Funny, I don’t see him here yet. I wonder what’s held him up.”

His musing was interrupted as Dumbledore rose from his seat to make the announcements and start the feast. The hall rapidly fell to silence. “I would like to welcome all of you to another year at Hogwarts. This year, something very special will be coming to pass. Hogwarts will be hosting an ancient competition, the Triwizard Tournament.” There was a slight pause as a low murmur filled the room, finally Dumbledore continued. “Unfortunately, due to this fact, the Hogwarts Quidditch season will be cancelled.”

Esdras knew this was coming, so he was able to remain seated as Cho, Roger Davies, Ben Britten, and Chambers all rose from their seats, along with members of the other three house teams, and voiced a loud protest. Cho was particularly vocal. “This is lunacy. We have to have a Quidditch season!”

Dumbledore raised a hand and slowly the hall fell to silence. “We will be hosting representatives from two other schools, the Beauxbatons Academy of Magic and the Durmstrang Institute. They will be joining us on...”

The headmaster's announcements were interrupted when the great door swung open to admit an old, grizzled man, graying at the hair and sporting one black and one vivid blue eye. Esdras shot out of his seat, took Dementor form, floated in midair, pointed at the man, and shouted in a raucous voice. "MAD EYE MOODY!"

The commotion was instantaneous. The first years began screaming at the sight of the Dementor. Moody turned to the Dementor and shouted something in Azkabaaner which caused Esdras to float on his back, laughing hysterically. Control was only established by Dumbledore coughing loudly. "If everyone will be so kind as to take their seats again. I believe I should take this opportunity to introduce Admiral Esdras Demnin of the Azkaban Guard, commander of the Fourth Fleet stationed just outside of Hogwarts. He and his men will be providing security services for the foreseeable future. You are reminded to not give any Dementor reason to see you as a threat, but do not fear them. Also, Professor Alastor Moody will be taking up the mantle of Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor this year. As a retired auror, you can be assured of a most interesting year under his tutelage." He looked around and smiled. "Well, we can discuss the Triwizard Tournament at a later date, can't we? I suggest we begin the feast."

Esdras, for once, ignored the food. Taking human form again, he floated over the table and hovered beside the older man who was hobbling at a quick pace to the High Table. "Moody, you old dog, where have you been hiding yourself?"

The auror laughed and spoke in a low growl. "I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you, you immortal bastard."

The Dementor laughed and threw an arm around him. "It's good to see you, old friend. When I heard it would be you teaching the class, I was so pleased. I know it won't be like old times, but I hope we can find time for a drink somewhere during the year."

Moody smiled and nodded, putting an arm around the Dementor and laughing. "You can count on it. We have to toast your promotion, Admiral Demnin." Moody took a step back, his magical blue eye

examining Esdras closely. Finally, the old man laughed. "I can't believe how human you look. It almost has this eye fooled."

Esdras shrugged humbly. "This took me one hundred years to master, I damned well better look good."

Moody nodded. "Let's get some food in us, then. There's no such thing as constant vigilance on an empty stomach."

Esdras was bouncing in his seat. Roger Davies shook his head slowly as they waited for class to start. "I can't believe you know the Defense professor."

The Dementor smiled. "Know him? I've worked with the man off and on for over forty years. He knows his stuff." He grinned wildly and looked to Roger, then over his shoulder to Cho. "Just be ready for anything."

Class began immediately with the resounding boom of a book falling at the back of the classroom. Esdras bolted to the ceiling and had his wand drawn at the source. Professor Moody stood by the door, smiling slyly. "Admiral Demnin here was trained at the Azkaban Guard Academy and hasn't forgotten his training. I've spent years trying to teach our aurors the same level of vigilance that these Dementors have mastered. I want to instill that same level of constant vigilance into each and every one of you over the next year. The Dark Arts are all around you, and you have to be on the lookout. It can be blindingly obvious or it can hide in plain sight. You must always show constant vigilance if you want to survive against it. Constant vigilance." The professor summoned the book from the floor and walked to the front of the classroom. "You can come down now, Esdras."

The Dementor floated back down to his seat and sat down. He looked over at Roger and smiled. "I told you."

At the front of the classroom, Moody had pulled out a jar which contained two spiders. He continued his lesson. "Lupin did good work last year bringing you up to speed in magical creatures, but you all are woefully unprepared as far as curses go. After some discussion

with Dumbledore, I believe you should know the worst of what you're up against. Who can name the Unforgivable Curses?"

Any and all humor left Esdras' face as he raised his hand. At Moody's nod, he spoke clearly. "There are three, the Imperius, the Cruciatus, and the Avada Kedavra. The use of any one of the three will land a mortal a life sentence in Azkaban." Esdras suddenly smirked. "However, section 53 of the Treaty of Edinburgh allows for the unrestricted use of all three by Dementors."

Moody nodded gruffly. "Very good, ten points to Ravenclaw." He pulled the first spider out of the jar and enlarged it to about a foot. "The Imperius puts the subject of the curse under your complete control." He pointed his wand at the spider. "Imperio." Almost immediately, the spider began to do a very impressive dance routine. Moody shrunk the spider and looked out over the class again. "You can train yourself against this curse with practice. However, some magical creatures are immune. Imperio!"

The professor's wand was pointed at Esdras. The entire class turned to face the Dementor, only to see him sitting impassively in his seat and staring at Moody. "I'm not going to dance, if that's what you expect."

Moody let out a harsh laugh before pulling out the second spider and enlarging it. "The Cruciatus puts the subject of the curse in unbelievable pain." Again, he pointed his wand at the spider. "Crucio." The poor creature began to writhe wildly, letting out a small screeching sound which made some of the weaker stomachs in the room a little queasy. He ended that particular demonstration mercifully fast, shrunk the spider, and put it away. "Fewer magical creatures are immune to this curse. Crucio!"

Again, the Unforgivable struck Esdras. This time, however, the Dementor shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "They get the point, Mad Eye. This is just irritating." The curse broke and Esdras scratched at his stomach for a few seconds more before huffing slightly and leaning back in his seat.

The old auror wasn't finished yet. "Esdras, stand up for me."

The lack of a spider was Esdras' first clue. "What? Oh no you don't. Mad Eye, you know how big of a pain that is."

Moody took another step towards the Dementor. "Esdras, stand up. I don't feel like killing a spider."

Roger and Cho were looking with horror at the approaching form of their Defense professor. Finally, Esdras just sighed. "Then don't show it to us, I don't want to do this. I haven't had it happen in years and I'm not in any mood for it to happen today."

Moody by now was standing at the edge of the desk containing Esdras and Roger. The former was staring defiantly into the professor's eyes; the latter was looking like he'd rather be anywhere else. Moody began to speak slowly. "The Avada Kedavra is the killing curse. It kills without trace, leaves no mark, and is undetectable by muggle means." He drew his wand and pointed it at the Dementor.

Esdras closed his eyes. "Alastor..."

"Avada Kedavra!"

A green blast of light and the sound of fast rushing air filled the room. When the light cleared, Esdras lay prone on the floor in his Dementor form. Cho screamed and rushed to his side. Just as she moved to turn him over, Esdras groaned loudly and let out a violent retching sound, a stream of glowing green liquid pouring from his mouth. The glowing liquid began to hiss and eat through the stone floor. Esdras coughed loudly for a few times before screaming. "Moody, you rat bastard! I told you not to do that!"

Moody seemed unfazed and continued the lecture. "The Avada Kedavra is fatal to every living creature, magical or non magical, except for one. The Dementor is the only creature known to be able to survive it."

Cho looked up with fire in her eyes. "I'm taking him to the Hospital Wing."

Esdras retched again, the glowing green pool growing beneath him, dissolving more of the floor. "Unless you've got anything else you want to test on me, you one eyed git?"

Moody reached down and pulled the Dementor to his feet. "No, Esdras, nothing else. Thank you."

Esdras glared, but his expression softened. "Whatever." He retched again, and looked down at the puddle. "I'm not cleaning this up."

Moody laughed and let the pair out of the classroom. When they were out in the hall, Esdras paused to retch into a nearby water fountain, causing it to melt and leak water onto the floor. "Oh, this is irritating."

Cho looked nervously at her friend. "Esdras, what's wrong with you?"

There was a pause as the Dementor took a drink of water from the still functional spigot, the only thing a Dementor was able to do with the liquid without it freezing up on him. He collected himself and moved down the hall, leaning heavily on Cho for support. Of course, to Cho, the heavy lean of the Dementor was no more than the weight of her backpack. Esdras groaned and held his stomach, speaking slowly. "It's nothing serious. The curse messes with the supersolenoid. It makes the ichor in circulation toxic, so I have to purge it and replace it from my reserves."

Cho stopped as the Dementor retched behind a statue. "So is it fatal?"

Esdras shook his head. "Hardly. The only way it would be fatal would be if I ran out of ichor. And since a mortal would have to be close enough to cast the spell, there would be an easily available food source nearby." He guided her to the stairwell and began to descend. At her confused look he continued. "We're finding Harry, he has Herbology this period. Madame Pomfrey won't be able to heal this, so I'll need to feed to replenish my reserves."

Cho nodded, the retching attacks were coming less frequently and in smaller volumes. She sighed in relief as it looked like he had finished with the worst of the problems. They stepped outside into the sun and made their way towards the greenhouses. Cho smiled as she guided

the limply floating Dementor along. "So, where does something like this fall in Moody's scale of constant vigilance?"

The sound of quick footsteps echoed through the halls of Hogwarts. The owner of those feet came to a door and pounded loudly upon it. It was a long moment before the door cracked open, the gap between door and wall showing only the tip of a wand and an electric blue eye. Finally, the door opened, and Mad Eye Moody let his visitor in. "Well, Miss Bell, how can I..."

The sound of a harsh slap filled the office of the Defense professor, stinging his cheek and halting his words immediately. Katie's chocolate brown eyes flashed with fury. "How dare you! How dare you think you can cast an Unforgivable at Esdras. I don't care if he's a Dementor or not, that is no excuse." She rounded on him, backing him slowly across the room. "Do you have any idea what your little display did to him? He won't be able to access his animagus spell for a week. A whole week! He's still vomiting contaminated ichor and he's apparently going to be dry heaving for another two days. He won't be able to eat or sleep during that time." She had backed him up to the desk and glared one last time at him. "You don't know how lucky you are. He would have killed anyone else without a second thought for doing that, and he would have been within his rights under Azkaban law."

She turned on her heel and walked briskly out the door, leaving the Defense professor in shock in his office. She quickly made her way down to the Great Hall where dinner was waiting. Even if she hadn't expected it, she would have noticed the nine foot tall Dementor sitting at the Ravenclaw table immediately. Forgoing her own table, she went to Esdras and wrapped her arms around his skeletal frame from behind. "How are you feeling, dear?"

Esdras brought his napkin to his hand and coughed long and loud. When he withdrew the cloth, it was easy to see the flecks of glowing green eating through it. He turned slightly to face her and smiled brightly, making space for her on the bench. "I'm actually feeling better. It doesn't hurt at all right now, but the dry heaves are annoying. And the coughing is just a bit of a pain."

Katie wedged herself in at the Ravenclaw table and hugged Esdras tight. She laughed softly. "I guess I get the pleasure of seeing this side of you for the next week."

The Dementor shrugged and sat up straighter. "Well, the ickle first years have to get used to me somehow, don't they?"

Chapter 8 – Enter the Goblet

The entire school had assembled on the front lawn to welcome the arrival of the delegations from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. Esdras, his animagus form restored a fortnight earlier, stood beside Katie, waiting for the eventual arrival. He took up a comfortable low hover and put the hood of his assault cloak up, listening to the chatter from his men over the hood's communications charm. "Beauxbatons delegation is inbound; time to arrival is one minute. There is still no sign of the Durmstrangs."

Katie drew her Azkaban issue cloak a little tighter. "Nice of them to take their time in this weather, wouldn't you say?"

The weather had been breezy and threatening to rain all day, with low grey clouds hovering over the school. It was from these same clouds that a great carriage, pulled by winged horses, emerged. The school gasped in awe as the carriage came in for a landing on the yard. It was another moment before a group of painfully underdressed young women emerged, led by Madame Maxime. Esdras smirked to himself. "I hope they brought cloaks."

His comment drew a snort of laughter from those around him, but no reply was forthcoming as, in the distance, the lake began to roil violently. Esdras called a few commands into his hood, but quickly cancelled his orders as the mast of a ship pierced the water. Katie nodded slowly. "There was no sign of the Durmstrangs because there's no way you could detect them underwater."

The Dementor nodded in reply and leaned in to whisper in her ear. "You'll have to excuse me; I have duties to perform right now."

Katie nodded and watched him glide away. He disappeared in the crowd, but soon enough reappeared at the side of Albus Dumbledore. The delegations from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang made their way to face the students of Hogwarts and the various heads of the schools stepped forward to meet in the middle. Esdras followed behind Dumbledore.

The three heads and the Dementor greeted each other and Madame Maxime spoke first. "Albus, this weather is awful. I must get my girls inside before they catch their death of cold."

Dumbledore nodded and looked to Esdras. "Are your men ready to bring the Goblet and Trophy in?"

The Dementor nodded and lifted his hood again, taking his Dementor form and rising into the air. He spoke a single order into the communications link. "*Do it.*"

On cue, a full division of Dementors, thirty strong, bearing two wooden crates, descended from the low hanging cloud cover. The students of Hogwarts took great pride in not reacting as the students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang let out shrieks and shouts, some even going so far as to draw their wands. The division intercepted Esdras as he rose, and he took control of their descent, landing them a few feet behind the Hogwarts students.

The Dementors float marched forward, parting the Hogwarts students and pressing them in towards the students from the other two schools. Finally, they reached the heads of the schools and slid to a halt. Esdras drew a parchment from his sleeve, snapped to attention, and spoke quietly. "*By order of the Ministry of Magic, Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, you are hereby requested and required to take possession of the Goblet of Fire and Triwizard Trophy for the remainder of the Hogwarts school year for use in the Triwizard Tournament. Signed by Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic, this thirtieth day of October, mortal year AD 1994.*"

Esdras rolled up the parchment and presented it to Dumbledore, who accepted it with a smile. "*Thank you Admiral Demnin, and my thanks to the Fourth Fleet of the Azkaban Guard for transporting them for me.*"

The Dementor nodded sharply and turned to face his men. "*Thirteenth Infantry, you are dismissed.*"

The division swept up into the air and began to float off, some of them pausing to wave at Katie as they passed. She smiled and waved to them, but her reverie was broken when she heard a thickly accented

voice whisper loudly. "Mon dieu, he eez so handsome! And look at how his eyes glow!"

Her curiosity piqued, Katie turned to face the speaker, a rather plain looking Beauxbatons student with shining platinum blonde hair standing not three feet away. The girl was attracting far more attention from the menfolk than Katie would have otherwise expected. She was huddled conspiratorially with her friends and pointing off to her left. Katie followed her finger and quickly narrowed her eyes. The blonde French girl was pointing directly at the mortal form of Esdras.

Dinner was served immediately after the transfer of the Goblet, and Katie spent the whole of the meal glaring with righteous fury at the blonde Frenchwoman who continued to make eyes at Esdras from across the Ravenclaw table, where the entire Beauxbatons delegation had taken seats. To his credit, the Dementor looked supremely uncomfortable, and constantly looked overtop of the Hufflepuff table to Katie with pleading eyes, as if begging her to either understand or help.

The glaring did not subside, even as Dumbledore unveiled the Goblet of Fire and explained the rules of the Tournament. He stood before the ancient looking cup, which began to emit a brilliant blue flame. "The Triwizard Tournament was created 700 years ago to promote friendly competition between our three schools. It consists of three competitions scattered throughout the year designed to test the magical ability, daring, deduction, and ability to handle danger of the competitors. The Goblet of Fire will choose one representative from each of the three schools to compete. Those of you who should choose to enter are to be warned. If you are selected, you will enter a magically binding contract and be required to compete. You should not take entering lightly." He looked paused and looked around the room. "Due to the danger of this competition, I will be drawing an Age Line around the Goblet of Fire. No one under the age of seventeen will be allowed to place their name in the Goblet. If you wish to compete, you have until tomorrow to place your name in the Goblet. Good luck to all those who may choose to enter."

As the wizened wizard dismissed the school, Katie had to be held down by both Fred and George Weasley as she watched the Beauxbatons student lean across the table to whisper something to Esdras, who promptly blushed a deep grey. Katie, in turn, was holding down both Fred and George, who were equally furious over the Age Line to be imposed on the Goblet. She left the twins to some of the older students and quickly pushed her way through the crowd to the Ravenclaw table. The blonde had insinuated her arm around Esdras' and was currently telling him something in her thick accent. Katie blocked their path and growled in Azkabaaner. "*Esdras, explain. Now.*"

Esdras extracted his arm from the girl's grip and waved his arms defensively in front of him. "*Katie, I have no idea! She just started following me around and I can't get rid of her. Make her go away!*"

The desperation in the voice of the powerful Azkaban Lord Admiral made Katie laugh softly. The display was not lost on the Frenchwoman, who looked curiously at them as they spoke in the unusual harsh whispers. When Katie's laughter had subsided, she smiled politely and spoke in her thick accent. "Bon jour, I am Fleur Delacour. Are you one of Esdras' friends?"

Katie looked at Fleur with amazement. "I'm his girlfriend."

Fleur blinked in shock, and then stared at Katie for a long second. Finally, she began laughing daintily. It was a moment before she had calmed down enough to speak. "Please forgive me; I still do not understand your British humor. But someone who eez as handsome as Esdras dating someone like you..."

Behind her, Esdras glared icily and slowly transformed into his natural Dementor form. When he spoke, his voice was laced with the thick, harsh accent of his native language. "If I were you, I would choose your next words carefully, for they could be your last."

Fleur turned and stared at the towering Dementor for a split second before moving backwards so fast that she tripped over her own feet and fell onto the ground. Katie calmly stepped over her and moved to Esdras' side. She smiled politely. "You're right though, Fleur, he really is incredibly handsome."

Katie stood on her tiptoes and Esdras leaned down, capturing her lips in a soft kiss which made the blonde gasp in terror before propelling herself from the ground and out the door. Esdras floated quietly for a moment before shaking his head. "I'm fluent in two languages and still words fail me."

The mortal rested her head against his chest and sighed, idly tracing a pattern on his chest. "Well, her reaction is expected. It's not exactly common knowledge that Dementors are such amazing kissers." She looked up at her hovering love and smiled. "Well, no need to dwell on her; I think we managed to effectively scare her off. Are you going to put your name in the Goblet?"

Esdras took mortal form again simply so he could roll his eyes. "You heard him; he's drawing an Age Line around the Goblet. No one under seventeen will be allowed to participate."

Katie punched him in the shoulder. "You're three hundred thirteen, you immortal idiot. Now are you going to put your name in the Goblet or not?"

The Dementor shrugged playfully and took her hand. "Maybe."

Despite the events of the day before, Esdras still found himself being followed around by the platinum blonde Frenchwoman. At lunch, he made his way stealthily over to the Gryffindor table. He took a seat beside Katie and rested his head on the table. Ron looked over to the Dementor and glared. "I don't see what you're on about. Any other guy would be happy to have her following them around. And it's not like she'll be able to break you and Katie up. You two have been dating for a year now."

Esdras nodded. "One year today." He looked over at Katie and smiled softly. "Happy anniversary, darling. Some anniversary it's turning out to be, though." She smiled softly and put an arm around him as he groaned and put his hands on his head. "But Ron, you don't have to listen to her. Her voice is so grating."

Ron blinked in confusion. "Esdras, she's got a beautiful voice."

The Dementor shook his head slowly. "Not if you're a Dementor. I guarantee you she's not completely human even though her soul glows like one. Going by the hair and the voice, she has to have some Veela in her."

Harry looked past the Hufflepuff table to where the Beauxbatons were slowly integrating into the Ravenclaw fold. "Esdras has a point, she does have the look."

Katie sighed sadly and began rubbing the Dementor's back. Soon enough the dark creature was hovering and limp to her touch. When it was obvious he had relaxed, she spoke quietly to him. "Have you put your name in the Goblet yet?"

Esdras was a bit too relaxed and answered truthfully. "Not yet, I want you there with me. Call it an anniversary gift, since I won't be able to do anything proper until the next Hogsmeade visit."

The mortal smiled happily and patted him on the back. "Well, whenever you want to do it, I'll be there for you."

The Dementor nodded and sat up, stretching his back and yawning. "Well, now is as good a time as any then. Someone get me some parchment." Within seconds there were ten sheets of parchment, five quills, and two inkwells in front of him. He smirked slightly. "If I didn't know better, I would say people were optimistic about my chances."

He wrote his name in his best Azkabaaner script on a scrap of parchment and rose from the table. Katie followed him along into the Entrance Hall where the Goblet had been set up. When the pair turned around, they found that their exit had attracted a small multi-house force that had come to watch. Esdras sighed and walked to the edge of the Age Line where he left Katie. As he crossed the boundary, he began to ripple, his fourteen year old animagus form being denied entrance. He quickly disengaged the spell and floated the last few steps to the Goblet and dropped his name into the blue flames. The crowd went wild.

The students of Hogwarts, Beauxbatons, and Durmstrang all sat in rapt fascination as Dumbledore tapped the Goblet to make it disgorge

the three names that would be competing in the Triwizard Tournament. Bright blue sparks signaled the first participant, and Dumbledore caught the parchment as it fluttered to the ground. "From Beauxbatons, Fleur Delacour."

The Great Hall erupted in cheers as Fleur stood and walked quickly down between the tables and into the side door near the High Table. Esdras paled and turned to Cho. "Suddenly, I find myself hoping I don't make it into the Tournament."

Cho shook her head slowly as the Goblet sparked again and Dumbledore picked up the second name. "From Durmstrang, Viktor Krum."

The Dementor looked over to see Cho cheering loudly, like all the other girls in the room. He shook his head slowly. "Not you, too, Cho."

She shrugged as the blue sparks appeared for the last time. "From Hogwarts, Cedric Diggory."

Esdras, though disappointed, cheered loudly for his school's champion. Diggory followed the path that Fleur and Viktor had taken to go into the side door near the High Table. Standing beside the Goblet, Dumbledore prepared to dismiss the students when suddenly the cup began to spark again. The Dementor raised an eyebrow at this. "I counted three champions. Did I miss something?"

Cho shook her head. "Fleur, Viktor, Cedric. Three champions from three schools, there's nothing to miss."

All watched in awe as the blue sparks resolved into not one, but two folded pieces of parchment. Dumbledore caught them and opened both, his eyes wide with surprise. He quickly regained his composure and addressed the students. "Also from Hogwarts, Esdras Demnin...and Harry Potter."

Chapter 9 – Explanations

Esdras quickly herded Harry into the side room and promptly ignored the commotion they caused in the other champions. He spoke only to Harry. "You deal with them; I've got to get in touch with my people." Harry nodded blankly and moved to attempt some sort of damage control while the Dementor moved to the fireplace and cast some Floo powder into the grate. He stuck his head into the green fire and spoke clearly. "*Kirin Residence, New Demnin Dementor Township.*"

There was a brief pause as the fire and coals took the shape of a well appointed Azkaban residence. A male hood answered the call. "*Lord Admiral Demnin, is that you?*"

The admiral nodded. "Yes, *Gregor. I need to talk to Kira.*"

The Dementor nodded quickly. "*She's just getting Alphonse ready for bed; I'll get her for you.*"

There was a brief pause before a female hood took up the position in front of the fireplace. "*You wished to speak with me, Lord Admiral?*"

Esdras nodded quickly. "*Captain Kirin, I need you to get over here to Hogwarts immediately, and bring the best spellcoder you have on your staff with you, preferably one who can speak English. This is an emergency, someone tampered with the Goblet of Fire and it picked five champions.*" The captain's hood grew wide in surprise. "Yes, *Kira, you're looking at one of them. Now get over here fast.*"

The connection was disconnected before she could reply. Harry took up a place beside him and spoke quietly, since all eyes were still on them. "What was that all about?"

Esdras withdrew his wand and used it to open a window and fire red sparks out of it, a signal for his people. Only then did he turn to face Harry, speaking in a low whisper. "Captain Kira Kirin is the commander of the 212th Research and Development division. She's going to bring a spellcoder with her and we'll get to the bottom of this."

Harry shook his head. "What's a spellcoder?"

Before Esdras could reply, the door to the room burst open to admit the three heads of the schools, Bartemius Crouch, Senior, and Ludo Bagman, the five judges of the tournament. Crouch, in particular, was furious. "I knew that this would happen. I shouldn't have allowed you to modify the Goblet to accept Dementors, Albus. Now we're in this situation."

Dumbledore remained as calm as always. "Now now, Barty, we don't know that this had anything to do with the modifications made to the Goblet. Besides, as a student of Hogwarts, Esdras has as much right to participate in the Tournament as anyone else. He meets all the qualifications, including age."

Esdras stepped forward, glaring at Crouch. "Indeed. If I were you, I would be concentrating more on why the Goblet picked five champions, and picked two students at once for a fourth slot."

Crouch seemed unfazed. "And another thing, now we'll have to change all our plans since Admiral Demnin was included in the planning meetings for the Tournament."

Esdras shook his head. "No, if you'll recall, you had already discussed the challenges in the meetings before I arrived. You only included me to coordinate the Dementor security forces."

Dumbledore nodded at this. "He's right, Barty. And I must admit that I did add him after the challenges were discussed for just such a reason. Mr. Demnin knows as little about what will happen as the other four do."

The Dementor confidently held Crouch's gaze until the mortal looked away, then he turned to Dumbledore. "I've notified New Demnin. Captain Kirin is on her way with my fleet's best spellcoder."

The headmaster nodded quickly. "Then I will have the Goblet brought in immediately." He motioned to Madame Maxime, who nodded quickly and walked back out into the Great Hall to get the questionable vessel. "In the meantime, I suggest we all relax and await the arrival of Mr. Demnin's friends."

The wait was mercifully short, as a Dementor and Dementress in military cloaks arrived moments after Madame Maxime returned with the Goblet. The black cloaked pair snapped into a salute in front of their commander. Esdras returned the gesture and moved to shake both their hands. The captain introduced her subordinate. "*Lord Admiral Esdras Demnin, this is my expert spellcoder, Lieutenant Commander Tycho Grave.*"

The admiral nodded and grasped the Dementor's hand. "*Tycho, I know of you only by reputation. Would you like to have a look at the Goblet?*"

The young commander nodded quickly, he was obviously nervous to be in the presence of high rank and royalty. "*Yes, Lord Admiral.*"

The Goblet was brought over and after a few moments of summary evaluation, the spellcoder began to cast long, complicated spells in both English and Azkabaaner. The space overtop of the Goblet began to glow in a myriad of colors and all argument in the room fell to silence as the mortals watched the spectacle before them. It was a good fifteen minutes before the Dementor let out a low whistle. Esdras looked up from his conversation with Kira and called out. "*You have something, Grave?*"

Tycho held up a hand. "*One moment, Lord Admiral.*" It was actually another half minute before he stepped back. "*Yes, sir. I have it.*" He stepped back to reveal that the space overtop of the Goblet was now shining with various colored words transitioning between English and Azkabaaner at regular intervals, most were red, some were blue, and a few were a particularly nasty shade of purple.

The mortals all gathered around the Goblet and Esdras nodded to the commander. "*Report.*"

The Dementor nodded and slipped fluidly into English for the sake of the mortals in his audience. "Well, sir, as you know the Goblet of Fire is over 700 years old, so it's running class twelve-delta spells."

Tycho was immediately interrupted by Karkaroff. "What is a class twelve-delta spell?"

He thought for a few seconds. "How best to explain it to you..." He started the explanation slowly. "Mortal spells change over time as a result of subtle variations in your spoken language. This is why you use a Latin base for most of your spells, since this language is considered dead, it changes very little. However, variations in inflection and use still make new classifications arise every few centuries. Current mortal spells are cast using class fifteen-beta spells." He turned to face the Goblet, indicating the red words. "These spells are the original spell compliment of the Goblet of Fire; they've remained relatively unchanged for the last seven hundred years." He indicated a particular spell and highlighted it in white. "This one was cast yesterday by Dumbledore to allow the Goblet to register Dementors. Headmaster Dumbledore used a twelve-delta spell in order to merge his spell with the Goblet's existing spell base."

Dumbledore nodded in assent. "I was unaware that spells of different ages were given different classifications, but it is well known that you shouldn't use modern spells on an ancient object. Otherwise, you run the risk of spells interacting in unexpected ways."

Tycho nodded. "And that's what happened here. These blue spells are modern class fifteen-beta spells, and they were forced on top of the twelve-delta spells. The purple here indicates where the spells interacted, and that's where the problem lies."

Mad Eye Moody spoke up. "Well, out with it then. What happened?"

The Dementor expanded the purple section, the text was faded and it looked like multiple lines of text were written one atop the other. "As near as I can tell, the class fifteen-beta spells cast were supposed to be a Confundus charm to confuse the Goblet, then the command to select Harry Potter as champion from a fourth school. After the spells interacted, the Goblet registered that it should select Harry Potter and a champion from a fourth school, bringing the total to five. The spell interactions affected Dumbledore's Dementor-inclusion spell, and the Goblet inferred that the fourth school should be a Dementor institution. Hence why Lord Admiral Demnin was selected."

Crouch narrowed his eyes. "How did something like this happen, and who did it?"

Moody spoke with a low growl. "This is the work of dark wizards. Powerful ones, too, if they were able to cast a Confundus on the Goblet."

The Dementor nodded. "Powerful, but stupid. Beyond that, I'm afraid I can't tell you much. Between the Confundus charm and the spell interactions, I can't even determine what kind of wand was used, let alone the caster's identity."

The mortals seemed to collapse as their hope of a quick resolution was taken away. Esdras sighed and nodded to his subordinates. "Lieutenant Commander Tycho Grave, this work will be noted in your service record and will reflect positively at your next service review." He switched to Azkabaaner and spoke to the Dementress. "*Kira, I need you to get Aaron and Stephanie and tell them to report to me immediately. The mortal news media is going to be all over this like green on mint and I want to put a positive spin on it.*"

The captain snapped to attention. "Yes, *Lord Admiral.*"

Esdras smiled at both of them. "*You are dismissed.*"

The meeting of the champions broke up not long after that. The general outline of the Tournament was given, along with the explanation that the first challenge would test daring, and all were sent back to their respective dorms to ponder the event before them. Esdras made it back to the Ravenclaw common room and found everyone still awake and waiting for him, including one person who didn't quite belong. He smiled when she ran up to him. "Katie!"

Katie had been summarily let in by the Ravenclaws after dinner; all rules regarding admission of visitors had been just as summarily ignored. She hugged him tight. "What's going on, Esdras? How come five were chosen?"

The Dementor spent a good five minutes explaining the malfunction in the Goblet before everyone in Ravenclaw was satisfied that neither Esdras nor Harry were self-serving enough to have done something to ensure their inclusion in the Tournament. Esdras sighed. "The media is going to have a field day with this. And for as much as I

know this is going to be a big deal, I don't want to have to put too much thought into it. I still have OWLs to worry about."

Roger shook his head. "I don't think that's going to be possible. Five wizards in the Triwizard Tournament, one of them the Boy Who Lived, and one the famous Dementor Lord Admiral, it's going to be a media frenzy."

A harsh whispered voice came from the window. "Actually, it should be rather easy to deal with." Aaron Reaping floated slowly into the common room followed by Stephanie Trieste. The Ravenclaws made room for the two Dementors, welcoming them warmly into their abode. Aaron continued. "We just have to beat the mortals to the story, which we've already done."

The young lieutenant nodded at what the captain had said. "*Captain Kirin gave us the basic details of what happened. I've already written out an article under the assumed name of one of Azkaban's freelance writers. Would you like to review it, my Lord?*"

Esdras shook his head. "*No, I trust your judgment in these matters better than I would trust my own.*" At the general looks of confusion from his mortal friends, he laughed and slipped into English. "Please forgive Lieutenant Trieste; she is still learning to speak English. The Guard Command learned a long time ago that the best way to prevent an increase in mortal fear of our kind was to use the mortal media to our advantage. We have a few names that we use to submit articles to the Daily Prophet with, articles that help paint us in a more positive, or at least neutral, light."

Cho made a sound of understanding. "I think I remember something like that happening years ago. It was an article about a Dementor saving a child from drowning in a lake."

Aaron nodded. "The event actually happened, and we rushed a truthful report to the paper. We intercepted the mortal written article and it basically accused the Dementor of trying to steal the child's soul and drown the body."

Esdras moved to the fireplace and stared into the glowing embers for a few seconds. "*Reaping, Trieste, translate the article and get it to the*

Daily Prophet without delay. They're probably holding the presses for some mention of who has been chosen, if we can beat the mortal reporter, all the better." He then sighed and turned to the captain. *"Captain Aaron Reaping, I hereby place you in direct command of all troop planning in regards to the Triwizard Tournament. You are required to not report your actions to me, and are authorized to change my deployments to fit the needs of the Tournament at your discretion. I know cheating is rampant in this event, but if I maintain my current duties, the amount of information that I would have access to would be overwhelming."*

Aaron snapped to attention. *"Yes, sir, I understand."*

The admiral nodded and smiled. *"I will brief the fleet once I better understand the situation I am in. You are both dismissed."*

As the Dementors saluted and flew off into the night, Katie stepped up to Esdras' side and put her arms around him. "Well, I for one am very proud of you. The Goblet wouldn't have chosen you if you weren't worthy of the honor."

Esdras sighed and leaned his head against the mantelpiece. "I suppose so, but I still would have liked to be the champion by my own merit and not some malfunction caused by an idiot dark wizard."

Katie nodded and leaned in closer to him. The rest of Ravenclaw kindly ignored them, and far too quickly, Katie pulled away. "I have to get back to my common room, I need to study potions."

The Dementor nodded and slipped out of his mortal form before floating to the window. "Let me fly you, it'll be quicker."

The mortal nodded and giggled softly as he lifted her into the bridal position. Her voice was a breathy whisper in his ear. "Fly me anywhere."

Chapter 10 – A Great Weight

Esdras was nodding off in History of Magic again. Katie had long since passed out so there was really nothing left keeping the Dementor awake. The ghostly form of Professor Binns kept going on about events that he had already lived through, and in some instances, participated in. So it was a pleasant surprise when Stewart Ackerley came to collect him on orders from the lesson. The Dementor glided along behind the first year. “So, to what do I owe the pleasure of being dragged from my nap?”

Stewart shrugged. “Don’t know, but I wasn’t about to complain when Flitwick called me out of Herbology to do this.”

They wound their way through the halls of Hogwarts until finally they found their way to the staff room. Esdras stepped inside and found the other four champions, three heads of the schools, Crouch, Bagman, a curious man with strange eyes, and a rather revolting mortal female wearing lime green.

Dumbledore welcomed him in. “Esdras, thank you for joining us. We will be weighing the wands now.” He indicated first the gentleman, then the woman. “Allow me to introduce Mister Ollivander from the wand store of the same name, and Miss Rita Skeeter of the Daily Prophet.”

Esdras immediately moved to shake Ollivander’s hand. “It is a pleasure to meet you, sir. While the wands for my kind are outside of your scope, it is well known that for mortals, your work is without equal.”

Ollivander nodded and shook his hand firmly. “Yes, I fear I will never be able to master the Dementor wand with these mortal hands.”

Skeeter took the opportunity to brush Ollivander out of the way and smiled a greasy smile at Esdras. “Mister Demnin, would you mind answering a few questions for me?” She didn’t give the Dementor time to answer before drawing a notepad and a bright green quill. “Do you mind if I use a Quick Quotes Quill?”

Esdras reached out and calmly snapped the quill in half, causing it to bleed acidic green on the parchment. He shook his head at Rita Skeeter and smiled slightly. "No, you may not ask me questions, or use your special quill. I am aware of your reputation and I would like to remind you that under Azkaban law, the penalty for libel against a member of the royal house is death. And in a situation like this, extradition would be immediate under the auspices of the Treaty of Edinburgh. Please keep that in mind for any articles you may feel fit to write about me."

The Dementor was pleased to see the journalist turn horribly pale before Dumbledore, smiling slightly, gathered the champions around. "Now then, since we're all here, let's begin the weighing."

Esdras shrugged. "Sir, you do remember that the shroud core of my wand makes handling of the wand impossible by mortal hands, right?"

The headmaster nodded. "Yes, Esdras, and we've been told that a special authority will be arriving from Azkaban to help with the weighing of your wand. She had some rather curious requests, though."

The Dementor arched an eyebrow. He was truly confused as to who Azkaban would send to weigh his wand, as all Dementors fabricated their own wand as part of their rise to maturity. He shrugged and watched as Ollivander busied himself casting spells with the other wands. He was smugly pleased when he found out that his guess on Fleur's heritage was correct, so pleased that he actually approached her. "I knew you were part Veela."

She looked curiously at him, blushing shyly at the fact that he initiated a conversation. "How was eet zat you were able to tell?"

Esdras decided to be tactful, even at a whisper her voice was painful. "Your voice, you sound like a Veela. And to Dementors, Veela are very easy to discern in a crowd."

She nodded and took a step closer to the Dementor, but Esdras was distracted when the door opened to admit another familiar form. He

floated over to her and whispered quietly. "Katie? What are you doing here?"

Katie shrugged. "I don't know, Colin got me out of History and brought me here. He didn't say anything about why." She glared and thumped him hard on the shoulder. "Nice of you to leave me a note saying you were going somewhere. Now what's going on?"

Esdras grinned sheepishly. "Sorry, I thought I'd be back before you woke up..." He turned around and they both watched as Ollivander made wine pour from the tip of Harry's wand. "It's the weighing of the wands. Apparently, they have a way to weigh my wand, but they're waiting for someone from Azkaban. I have no idea who they'd bring."

It was a few moments more before his answer came. The door opened slowly, and two dozen Dementors, all with wands drawn, entered the room and gently corralled all the mortals but Katie against the far wall, facing them towards the stone. More Dementor guards entered the room and from their position, it was obvious that they were guarding someone, as even more stood out in the hall with their backs to the room. Esdras took note of the insignia on their cloaks and tensed. "No...it can't be. She shouldn't even be off the island."

Katie whispered quietly. "Who is it?"

Esdras, the rightful king of all Dementors took his natural form and slowly dropped to his knees as the guards parted to reveal a Dementress carrying a small cloaked bundle. Katie followed suit, figuring that if the king knelt, so should a mere mortal. The Dementor king lowered his hooded head to the cold stone floor and spoke quietly. "*The guards wear the insignia of the First Infantry; they are assigned to protect the seer. They escort the Oracle of Azkaban.*"

Katie watched as the Dementress floated forward towards Esdras. A soft voice emanated from the cloak. "*Hail Demnin, god of death.*"

Esdras never moved, but his voice came clearly from his hood. "*The Oracle has again mistaken me for that which I am not. Behold the mere Esdras Tarsus corvades Demnin. How may I serve you, great Oracle?*"

The Oracle bowed. *"The mortals have called us to weigh your wand, as is their custom. The prophecies indicated that the time was right to leave the island, so it was done."* Her attention changed from Esdras to Katie. *"You are the mortal who coexists so perfectly among our kind. Rise, my child."*

Katie, with no fear, rose to face the Oracle. Esdras rose with her and placed an arm across her chest. His voice was quiet and desperate. *"Katie, no mortal has ever touched the Oracle. The penalty for such is death, and I will have to enforce it..."*

The Oracle brushed the admiral aside. *"The prophecies have shown that she will be the first, and that she will survive. Will you go against the prophecies, Lord Demnin?"*

Esdras bowed and stepped back. *"No, great Oracle."*

Nodding, the Dementress floated forward and extended the small, cloaked bundle to Katie. She looked on with confusion. *"I don't understand..."* The bundle found its way into her arms and Katie adjusted it to hold it better, as she did so, the hood of the cloak slipped, and Katie could see the face of a small Dementress child, a mere cloakling. But instead of empty black eye sockets, this cloakling had pure white sockets. Suddenly, Katie understood. *"The cloakling is the Oracle."*

The small child reached up and touched her face, and Katie's world suddenly disappeared, transformed into a black nightscape, with shining silver forms and pitch black regions. A small voice echoed in her ears. *"See the world through the eyes of a Dementor, Katherine Elizabeth mashavades Bell. See the world through Esdras' eyes. Help me with my task."*

Esdras watched with fear and awe as the beautiful, chocolate brown eyes of his girlfriend disappeared, the brown iris and white sclera fading to pitch black. Katie spoke with a distant voice. *"This is how you see, my love? The world, it looks so different."* She paused to look at the child. *"What is the Oracle?"*

He slowly floated to Katie, speaking quietly. *"The Oracle is the only Dementor capable of prophecy. She is a true seer and a contact*

telepath. Her birth name is Kara cordes Grim; our Admiral Grim is her many-great-grandnephew. The Oracle was born 1519 years ago and will never grow any larger than she is right now. She is also blind, you can tell from her white eye sockets. She is the greatest treasure of Azkaban."

The voice filled Katie's ears again, and she found herself speaking the words. *"The god of death is too kind. He makes the Oracle into something she is not. Please, let me weigh your wand."* Esdras drew his wand and held it out; he was not surprised when Katie's hand actually touched it, and then held it. The link with the Oracle imbued the mortal with powers equal to that of a Dementor. *"A wand of foreign Hemlock, a distant tree for a distant family. Fifteen inches, unyielding but eternally fair and graceful, a dual core of dragon heartstring and royal shroud. It is a powerful wand for a powerful Dementor, truly a royal wand."* She raised the wand and a light brighter than the sun emanated from the tip, washing out all color in the room and casting deep shadows behind the Dementor guards. After a moment, she lowered it and held it back to the stunned Esdras.

The Dementor took his wand back anxiously. Although he trusted the Oracle explicitly, he was still uncomfortable with the whole situation. *"And now the Oracle will restore my Katie to me?"*

Katie nodded, but paused before handing the cloakling back. The Oracle spoke gently to her, filling her mind with the words. *"A great adventure awaits you, queen of Azkaban, and good fortune will bring you a long life and a longer legacy. This is the prophecy of the Oracle of Azkaban, heed it well."*

The Oracle removed her hand from Katie's face and Katie managed to hand the cloakling off to the Dementress before she collapsed into Esdras' arms.

Katie woke up an hour later in the Hospital Wing to the smiling face of Esdras and a pitcher of hot chocolate. He smiled softly and handed her a cup. "Welcome back. You'll need to drink this. The Oracle may be over 1500 years old, but she is still just a cloakling. She can't

control when she feeds. She has returned to Azkaban but asked for your forgiveness before she left.”

The mortal nodded and took the cup, letting the chocolate warm her and negate the effects that the Dementress child had on her. She closed her eyes and spoke slowly. “The Oracle gave me a prophecy; she told me it was a prophecy. She called me the queen of Azkaban, and said that I would have a long life and long legacy.”

Esdras smiled and took her hand, a dark grey blush across his face. “The Oracle is wise. If she says that you will have a long life and legacy, then it will be so.”

Katie blushed as well. “But what about the queen of Azkaban part?”

Esdras shook his head. “There will be time to worry about that later.” He looked down and pulled out a copy of the Daily Prophet, happy for a change of subject. “Did you get a chance to see the paper this morning?”

She shook her head. “No, I was too busy revising my potions essay. Why, what does it say?”

The Dementor held it out for her; already she could read the headline. “Goblet of Fire selects Five, Dementors Determine Cause.” Esdras grinned happily. “The Daily Prophet printed it exactly as we wrote it. It’s very favorable.”

Katie smiled and began to read the article. She laughed when she came to a specific line. “Admiral Demnin of the Fourth Fleet, selected as champion due to the Goblet malfunction called the incident ‘a disturbing situation, but both Mr. Potter and I will compete while supporting Cedric Diggory as best we can.’” She looked curiously at him. “When did you say that, Esdras?”

He shook his head. “I didn’t, Stephanie Trieste wrote the article, but it does sound like something I’d say, doesn’t it.” He grinned. “You met Stephanie the other day, she was with Aaron.”

Katie nodded. “She seemed very nice.”

The Dementor nodded and waved to Madame Pomfrey, who promptly began the walk down to Katie's bed. "Well, let's get you out of here, shall we?"

Hogsmeade always cheered up Esdras. The shining little town was always bustling with activity and the chances to visit it were few and far between for a student at Hogwarts. This year was particularly interesting because the students and residents of Hogsmeade had company, Dementors from the town of New Demnin would occasionally float by, clutching small baskets as they went from store to store.

So it was that every so often, Esdras would return a sharp salute and Katie would smile and greet the guard officer with a kind word. Esdras was especially pleased to see a particular pair of Dementors wandering through town; the Dementress trailing a thin wisp of fog behind her. He dragged Katie over to meet them. *"Katie mashavades Bell, this is Captain Veras vades Maul of the Eighth Infantry and his wife Kayla. Kayla is due to give birth any day now, right?"*

The Dementress nodded happily and spoke with an excited whisper. *"Yes, Lord Admiral. Doctor Transom has said that the cloakling is due sometime within the next week."* She placed a hand over her distended abdomen and wrapped her other arm around her husband. *"We are so excited."*

Esdras smiled and held a hand out. At Kayla's nod, he placed it on her abdomen and felt the smooth gliding motions of the cloakling as it floated within its mother's womb. With his other hand, he pulled Katie's hand to join his. Her eyes went wide as she felt the unborn child's motions. The mortal smiled. *"Do you know yet if it is a boy or a girl?"*

The young mother shook her head. *"No, we wish for it to be a surprise."* She turned to face Esdras. *"My Lord, while you are here. Veras and I were wondering if you would come and bless the cloakling when it is born."*

The Dementor sighed and nodded slowly. *"I cannot refuse the request of a mother with child. It shall be done."* Kayla took the

admiral's hand in her own and tried to kneel, but Esdras was quick to stop her. *"You need not obey custom at the sake of your health, or the child's."*

Kayla nodded and joined hands with her husband. *"A thousand blessings be upon the royal house, Lord Esdras."*

Esdras smiled. *"And a thousand blessings be upon this growing loyal house."*

The Mauls floated off, leaving Katie and Esdras in the low hanging fog that had gathered while they had paused to speak. Katie guided Esdras towards the Three Broomsticks. She looked curiously to him. "What was with the fog?"

The Dementor smiled. "The act of growing a cloakling requires a lot of energy for a Dementress. In addition to feeding on souls and Patroni, a pregnant Dementress will extract heat from her surroundings; the extremely cold air around her produces fog. It's all perfectly normal."

The mortal shook her head and laughed to herself about the many differences in Dementor physiology. "I've always heard that new mother's had a certain glow about them. I'm surprised to see that it's the same for Dementors."

Esdras laughed out loud. "That's because ichor production increases as the child nears birth. She's glowing because she has more ichor than her supersolenoid can handle."

Katie laughed again as they reached the door of the Three Broomsticks. However, they were both halted at the sound of a scream coming from farther up the High Street. Mixed curses in English and Azkabaaner floated down the street. Esdras spared a second to look at Katie before the pair rushed towards the commotion.

Farther down the High Street, in front of Zonko's, Captain Maul, with wand drawn and cloak flaring, stood protectively in front of Kayla. He was staring down a mortal who stood just as protectively in front of his equally pregnant wife, his own wand drawn to face the Dementor. The low fog added an ominous quality to the standoff. Esdras rushed

between the two, calling out orders. "*Veras, stand down. Stand down now!*"

Maul shook his head. "*He drew his wand first, he threatened Kayla! I will defend her!*"

Katie had meanwhile taken up a similar position, standing in front of the mortal. "Sir, please relax, he won't hurt you."

The mortal glared at her. "The hell he won't. His kind is all the same, they'll kill you as soon as look at you!"

Esdras shifted forms, taking his Dementor form and turning to face the mortal. "Please sir, stand down. Veras is protecting his wife. You can see that she is pregnant...like your own wife."

The mortal stared quietly for a moment. "A...pregnant Dementor?"

Katie nodded. "A Dementress. She is great with child, due to give birth in a week's time. Surely you cannot blame him for protecting her, as you have your own wife?"

Esdras turned quickly to face Veras Maul. "*Veras, look at the woman he is protecting. She is pregnant; you can see the child growing within her.*"

The Dementor narrowed his hood and peered around the mortals. The captain, like the admiral, was able to see a second, smaller glowing form within the woman. "*A pregnant mortal looks like that? How odd...*"

The admiral nodded. "*Odd, yes, but he is protecting her as you are protecting Kayla. Try to understand...*"

The Dementor captain lowered his wand, and Esdras was pleased to see that the mortal followed suit. He spoke softly, with Katie echoing his sentiment in English. "*See the similarities between our kinds? We protect that which we love from perceived danger. If we are to live together, we must understand each other.*"

Veras nodded, and after conferring with Kayla, produced a small package from the basket she carried. He floated forward and presented it to the mortal. Esdras translated the words that the captain spoke. "Here is a cloak for your cloakling. It will keep them safe and dry. Peace be upon your family."

The mortal was hesitant to accept the gift, but finally did so at the insistence of his wife, who held out a similar bundle. Katie translated for the mortal as he spoke. "*This is a blanket for your child.*" He hesitated, but finally smiled. "*Peace be upon your family, as well.*"

Esdras and Katie stepped back and watched as the two families of differing species observed each other. The Dementor admiral looked around and saw the crowd that had formed in the gathering mist. He called out quickly. "Alright, then, nothing to see here. Carry on about your business. Get moving. That's right."

The crowd dispersed and the fight averted, Katie returned to his side, a look of relief on her face. "That could have ended in tragedy."

Esdras nodded. "But it didn't. And that's sign enough that there is hope for mortals and Dementors to live in harmony." He looked on as Veras, with the mother's nod of approval, tentatively placed his hand on the mortal female's stomach and smiled. "Perhaps there is more than just a hope..."

Chapter 11 – The First Challenge

Mornings at Hogwarts had a bit of a rhythm to them. For Esdras, he would shower and dress, and float down to the Great Hall for breakfast. There, usually, Aaron would find him and give him the day's duty rosters and chat for a few minutes before they both went about their responsibilities. So it came as a shock to all when the morning routine was broken by the nine foot tall Aaron entering the Great Hall with a four foot tall cloaked form trailing behind him.

Esdras, however, had received a note late the prior evening regarding this, so he rose and took Dementor form as the two cloaked forms glided down the aisle. The smaller one stood in front of the taller one and Esdras addressed the small cloak, his voice a low, harsh whisper. *"And what brings you here today, Jacob Reaping?"*

The cloakling floated back a little and hid in the folds of his father's cloak until just his hood stuck out. He spoke with a soft whisper. *"I asked Papa if I could come see the mortals today since it's my birthday."*

Esdras narrowed his hood. *"You want to see the mortals? I suppose now that you're thirty six, you're too good for your godfather."* The little cloakling shook his hood furiously and floated out and leapt into the air, latching onto his godfather's neck. Esdras laughed merrily and spun the child around. *"Happy birthday, little one!"*

Jacob hugged his godfather tight. *"Thank you, Lord Esdras."*

The child was cut off with a dismissive sound. *"None of that, not today. Today is your day."* He perched the cloakling on his shoulder and presented him with a small stone. *"The stone is permanent, child of Azkaban, it changes not from year to year."*

Jacob took the stone and placed it in his small satchel before replying. *"But we are not the stone, child of Azkaban, our time is measured by the sand instead."*

Esdras smiled and waved a hand out over the crowded Great Hall. *"Look at all the mortals. Would you like to meet some of them?"*

The small child nodded fiercely. *"I want to see Katie again."*

Esdras nodded and motioned for Aaron to follow along; they could take care of paperwork later. The Dementors floated over to the Gryffindor table and glided slowly down the aisle. When they reached their target, Esdras called out to his better half. "Katie, someone wishes to see you."

Katie turned to face her boyfriend and smiled brightly when she saw who accompanied him. *"Jacob! It is good to see you, child."* Esdras sat the child down on the bench and leaned in to kiss Katie. As he did so, he pressed something small and round into her hand. Katie took a look at it and immediately understood. *"So, to what do we owe the pleasure of your visit?"*

Jacob's hood grew wide as he sat at the table; he was distracted by Fred and George, the first redheads he had ever seen, both of whom were giving him kind smiles. He finally replied to Katie. *"Papa promised I could see the mortals for my birthday."*

Katie gasped. *"Today is your birthday? Well, that means only one thing!"* She held out her palm, where a smooth, flat stone rested. *"The stone is permanent, child of Azkaban, it changes not from year to year."*

Jacob again brought out his satchel and placed the stone inside before hugging Katie and replying. *"But we are not the stone, mortal child, our time is measured by the sand instead."*

Esdras knelt down to bench level and looked around. *"Well, Jacob, what do you think?"*

The small Dementor tugged at his father's robe. *"Papa, I want to come here. I want to be like Lord..."* He corrected himself. *"Like Esdras and come to school here someday."*

The two adult Dementors and Katie all looked a little saddened at this statement, but were saved when a kindly voice sounded from behind them. *"Perhaps one day it may be so, young cloakling. You must never give up on your dreams, especially in this day and age, where opinions are constantly changing."*

Esdras rose as Aaron gestured to the grayed wizard. "*Jacob Martius cordes Reaping, this is Headmaster Albus Dumbledore. What do you say?*"

The cloakling stared with a wide hood at the aged mortal before murmuring the proper greeting. "*A thousand blessings be unto you and your house.*"

Dumbledore bowed politely. "*And unto you and yours, young Reaping.*"

The headmaster knelt down to talk more clearly with the young Dementor and Aaron and Esdras turned to discuss the duty rosters. The admiral looked them over and signed the forms. "*I notice no mention of what the 91st Infantry will be doing.*"

The captain nodded. "*Yes, sir. Sadly it is to do with the upcoming challenge. I can only tell you that they will be handling security.*"

Esdras laughed. "*Fair enough.*" He was interrupted by a light tugging on his cloak. He looked down at the source. "*Yes, Jacob?*"

The cloaking was floating with excitement. "*Will you come with Papa and me to see the dragons?*"

At this, Aaron's hood and Dumbledore's eyebrows shot up in a mixture of shock and amusement. Esdras switched to his mortal form just so he could look up at Aaron and smirk. "*The 91st?*"

Aaron nodded weakly and Dumbledore let out a small chuckle. "*Out of the mouth of babes shall come the truth.*" He rose and patted the cloakling on the hood, giving him a kind smile. "*Well, young one, I see a great future in intelligence for you. Enjoy the rest of your birthday.*"

As Dumbledore walked off, Harry Potter quickly approached the Dementors and looked around quickly. "Esdras, I'm glad I found you. I need to tell you something. The other night, Hagrid took me out into the forest. I know what the first challenge will involve."

Esdras looked blandly at the scarred mortal. "Dragons?"

Harry shook his head. "No, drag... Wait a minute, how did you know?"

Esdras tousled the hood of his godson and smiled. "Azkaban intelligence."

Katie had gladly agreed to join Esdras as he floated across the lake. She was bundled up against the weather and wind and leaned idly on her broomstick as they flew over the choppy water. "It's been almost three months; I can't believe this is the first time I'm going to New Demnin. You really should see if Dumbledore will allow for a New Demnin weekend. I'm sure at least some students would go. Especially now that the weather is turning and we need cloaks."

Esdras nodded. "Unfortunately, we're not going to New Demnin, we're going to the command bunker. But still, that might not be a bad idea. There's usually a pretty big bonfire for New Years. That would make for a good evening." They came to the clearing and floated to the ground. Esdras pulled out his wand and tapped the proper knot on the proper tree. He stepped into the resultant opening and held his arms out. "*Going down?*"

Katie laughed and stepped into his arms, securing the door closed behind them before Esdras began their descent. The bunker had been illuminated during the summer's renovations, so a warm green glow awaited them as they descended into the plain central corridor. Katie looked around as they took to the ground. "*Very utilitarian.*"

The Dementor shrugged. "*It is a military installation, after all.*" He pointed her down a hall. "*That way, towards the research labs.*"

This section of the command bunker had been reinforced with titanium bulkheads. Some already displayed charring around the edges, even after only three months of use. Katie looked slightly nervous as they entered a dark, cavernous space. "*Are you sure this is safe?*"

She was answered by a confident whispered voice. "*Of course it's safe, Miss Bell. We wouldn't have you or the Lord Admiral down here if it wasn't.*" A no-nonsense Dementress bearing the rank of captain

stepped from the shadows and approached them, extending her hand to Katie. *"Kira Kirin, 212th Research Division."*

After the two had shaken hands, Esdras returned the captain's salute and the three got down to business. The admiral and champion looked around the room and floated lazily. *"Well, what do you have for me?"*

Kira bowed, her voice full of excitement. *"Well, my Lord, I thought that Quicksilver Project Firestorm would be best suited for use with dragons."*

Katie looked to Esdras for explanation. *"Quicksilver Project?"*

Esdras took mortal form and smiled. *"That which I am about to tell you is top secret. You are only hearing this because I trust you as much as any member of my fleet."* His expression then became determined. *"The Quicksilver Projects are the most powerful research projects in the Azkaban Guard Command. They were consolidated into one program almost two decades ago when Voldemort was gaining power. My intention was to have them all under one command in case mortal or Dementor civil war broke out. That way, I could be sure that the person in charge of them was loyal to the royal house."*

Katie nodded quietly and Captain Kirin continued. *"All of our technology is cloak based, as you know, so each one of the projects is actually a series of spells incorporated into a cloak. Some of the projects have been around in various forms before, others are new, and all are incredibly powerful. When Voldemort died, the projects were spread out to different research units, despite the Lord Admiral's objections. Currently, we have almost half of the Quicksilver Projects in our possession. We're trying to acquire more."*

The mortal looked around. *"So what do these projects do?"*

Kira laughed and waved her wand. The cavernous space illuminated to reveal a warehouse sized room bathed in white light. At the other end of the room stood five Dementors, and the first one stepped forward when the captain motioned to him. *"We've prepared a small demonstration of some of them for you. First is the Transphasic*

Project. It allows the wearer to pass through any object; this also makes it an effective invisibility cloak." As she spoke, the Dementor closed the clasp of his cloak, turned, and floated through the wall. After a few seconds he reemerged on the other side of the room, turned invisible, and then reappeared where he had been standing initially. *"You can understand, of course, why we would prefer not to use this project for the challenge. We don't want anyone knowing about it."*

Katie looked on with wide eyes and nodded. *"That puts Harry's invisibility cloak to shame."*

Esdras laughed softly as the second Dementor stepped forward. Captain Kirin again spoke. *"Next is the Steelcloth Project, a cloak designed to be totally puncture proof."* The other four Dementors had taken up positions around the cloaked figure and began firing all manner of weapons, everything from crossbows to mortal rifles.

Esdras made a sound of approval. *"It's good for physical attacks since it also neutralizes any impact momentum, but it wouldn't neutralize the dragon's fire."* He smirked. *"There's a similar project back on Azkaban designed to do the same with magical damage."*

Kirin nodded as the third Dementor stepped forward. *"The Castcloth Project, I used to be project head of that one. Next up is the Berserker Project, a cloak designed to increase the wearer's strength ten thousand fold."* The Dementor wearing the cloak floated over to the wall and proceeded to punch a hole through the titanium plate reinforcing the room.

Katie gasped. *"As if you all weren't strong enough as it were."*

Both of the high ranking Dementors shrugged as the fourth Dementor stepped forward wearing black cloak that glowed silver on the inside lining. Esdras explained this project. *"The Tanker Project, a cloak made to hold up to five times the normal operating ichor of a regular Dementor. Perfect for long distance missions or extended deployments."*

Kira nodded as the fifth and final Dementor stepped forward. *"And this is the one I think you'll need, the Firestorm Project."*

The Dementor in front of them burst into flames.

Katie fidgeted on the bleachers. "I can't believe they kicked us out of the tent."

Hermione shook her head and groaned. "I can't believe that Rita Skeeter got a picture of Harry and me hugging. No good can come from that."

The elder Gryffindor smirked, however. Her face was still flushed. "I'm just glad Esdras gave her that talking to. She's been avoiding him like the plague and it certainly paid off today. I think I was able to calm Esdras down enough."

Shaking her head slowly, Hermione just looked out at the arena. "I can't understand how he would find that calming. I mean, you couldn't even fit a sheet of parchment between the two of you. Shouldn't he be concentrating on the event?"

Katie sighed and looked anxiously at Hermione. "Harry drew the Hungarian Horntail and Esdras drew the Hebridean Black, both are man eating dragons. He knows the risks he's about to take and if he wants to snog before he goes out there, I'm not going to say no to him." She shrugged slightly, a small smile on her face. "Not like I'd ever say no to him but..."

They were interrupted by the cannon firing and watched in fear as Harry attempted to outmaneuver the great dragon on his lightning fast broom. All of Gryffindor held their breath as Harry finally managed to get the great beast into the air, allowing him to swoop beneath it and steal the golden egg from the nest. A great cheer erupted from the stands and the nervousness seemed to increase as the crowd waited for the dragons to be changed for the last champion.

Cho took the opportunity to slip over and talk to Katie. "Do you know what he's going to do? He didn't tell any of us, he just kept saying that it was a top secret Azkaban thing."

Katie looked exasperated. "I know what he's going to use, but I have no idea what he's going to do."

Her head shot up sharply when the cannon sounded and Esdras stepped out into the arena. She stood up to get a clearer look at him and gasped. Cho followed her eyes and whispered in awe. "What on earth has he done to himself?"

Esdras stood in the open space of the arena. Over his shoulders he wore the Firestorm cloak, which was colored a red so dark it could be mistaken for black in any but the brightest light. He would have looked perfectly normal were it not for the fact that his eyes now glowed a pure, burning red instead of their usual green. Katie's eyes grew wide. "Would it have that kind of effect on his animagus form?"

No answer came as she watched Esdras rise into the air, garnering the attention of the great black dragon that stood guarding its nest. The Dementor raised his hood, the glowing red eyes now shining demonically from beneath the cloth. Slowly, Esdras withdrew his hand from the cloak. He held a heavy bar of shining metal. Cho narrowed her eyes. "What is that?"

The answer was immediate. Katie had seen bars like that before in Esdras' vault. "Platinum. It's pure platinum."

Down on the field, Esdras took the heavy bar and tossed it as far from both himself and the dragon as possible. The dragon regarded the brick for a second before returning her attention to the intruder. The Dementor shrugged casually and withdrew a large sparkling stone, a huge diamond.

Both Cho and Katie were confused. The Ravenclaw shook her head. "I don't get it. What's he trying to do?"

Hermione, however, was smiling. "He's trying to get the dragon to hoard. All dragons hoard as part of their nature. Esdras is the only one of the five champions with the material resources to provide enough precious metals and gems to get a dragon to abandon her nest to collect them."

As she spoke, Esdras continued to add to the pile, tossing bars of gold, silver, platinum, and numerous precious gems into the mix. The dragon was now leaning her head towards the rapidly growing treasure, looking anxiously from her nest to the Dementor to the

treasure. As silently as possible, the Dementor chanted the spell to initialize his afterburners. From the stands, Katie could see the glowing silver bars appear on the cloak over the vents for all eight float bladders, signifying the stand by mode of the ichor jets.

Esdras tossed another bar of silver on the pile and floated forward a few inches. The added bounty was enough to crack the dragon's resolve. She roared a deep, thunderous roar and fired a jet of bright orange flame directly at the Dementor as she moved to take the treasure. Esdras did not move from his position. Instead, he crossed his arms about his shoulders and activating his cloak in an echoing voice. "*Firestorm!*"

Seconds before the dragon's fire intercepted him, Esdras' spell caused the cloak to burst into bright red flames. He brought his arms down from his shoulders and fell to a low crouch as the dragon's flame washed over him. He called out again. "*Afterburners!*"

The second spell vaulted Esdras into full afterburner mode, the eight ichor plasma jets spread out over his shoulders, chest, and hips, propelling him out of the inferno at four hundred fifty miles per hour. The spectators in the stands only saw a trail of reddish silver fire sweep over the dragon's nest.

One second, the golden egg rested atop the carefully constructed stone nest. The next, a flame shrouded form with horrible red eyes floated high above the stadium, egg firmly in hand.

Chapter 12 – The Easiest Challenge

A still smoldering Esdras laughed brightly as Katie tackled him, almost knocking the freshly won golden egg from his hands. He held her tightly and kissed her. When she finally broke the kiss, she stared deep into his fiery red eyes and smiled seductively. “And I though your green eyes were sexy...”

The Dementor looked confused. “What do you mean?” Katie smirked and pulled out a compact, holding the mirror out to him. Esdras took one look at his reflection and let out a low whistle. “I’ll have to tell Kira about this. This is definitely an unexpected side effect.”

He slipped from the Firestorm cloak and, sure enough, his eyes returned to the comforting green that Katie had grown accustomed to. She slipped her hand into his and leaned against his arm. “Well, at least it didn’t affect the cloak. You were amazing out there, my dear.”

Esdras grinned, taking the rare opportunity to bask in his success. He was interrupted by a hand clasping him on the back. He turned to face Cedric Diggory, who was all smiles. “Well done out there, Esdras. That was some excellent transfiguration out there. Those really looked like bars of platinum.”

The Dementor laughed and scratched the back of his head. “Well, Cedric, you see, I didn’t really transfigure anything. I had Commander DeCay and Lieutenant Trieste go to the bank for me and make a small withdrawal from my vault.” He turned to Katie. “You know, those two are becoming quite the couple.”

Katie laughed. “You mean someone finally tamed Malachi the bachelor?”

Cedric, however, was still pondering the loot. “You mean...that was all real?”

Esdras nodded. “Every last ounce, every last gem.”

The Hufflepuff champion shook his head. “I don’t believe it. All those bars must have been worth over a hundred thousand Galleons.”

The Dementor sighed, eager to leave the topic behind him. "At current market price, five bars of platinum, three bars of gold, two bars of silver, and almost two hundred carats of diamonds works out to over a quarter million Galleons." He hefted the golden egg up and inspected it closely. "And the mama dragon gets something for her hoard. I think it's a fair trade."

Cedric gave the Dementor a strange look before nodding. "Well, still, congratulations."

Esdras nodded absently and continued to inspect his egg. Katie walked silently with him for a few moments. "So, are you going to open it?"

He turned to regard her for a second, and then shrugged his shoulders. "Sure." He carefully pulled the lid of the egg off and almost immediately, they were bathed in a horrible screeching sound. The Dementor flinched and nearly dropped the egg. "Cloaks of the ancients, what the hell is this?"

Katie pressed her hands to her ears shouted to him. "Close it! Close it!"

Esdras closed the lid and the screeching stopped, he held the egg at arm's length. "What just happened?"

Cho, who had the misfortune of being close enough to hear the noise as well, looked incredulously at him. "What was that? It sounded like nails on a chalkboard but a thousand times worse."

The three regarded the ovoid with suspicion. The Dementor's voice was steely and cold. "Damned if I know, but it sounded familiar. I have three months to figure it out, though, and I doubt a bar of platinum will help."

Charms class was usually fun for Esdras. While he had a full compliment of Azkaban spells to do the exact same things that he was learning to do, knowing the mortal equivalents was a pleasant change of pace. Professor Flitwick was also very good about allowing him to nod off in the corner or work on other homework or fleet

paperwork if he had already managed to show proficiency at the day's topic.

Today was a bit different, though, as Flitwick took to the center of the room to address the class. "As I'm sure you all have seen by now, the Yule Ball will be held on Christmas Eve. The heads of house have been asked to make sure that all students have at least some introductory lessons in dancing before this event." He turned to face the Dementor. "Esdras, wake up, you'll need to pay attention to this."

Esdras startled and his head shot up from the desk quicker than he could put on his mortal face. "I'm awake."

The diminutive professor nodded. "Good. You'll have to pay special attention, as the champions are expected to open the ball with a dance. Of course, I assume you already have a date in mind, so I won't tell you that you need to find one."

Laughing slightly, Esdras nodded. "I have someone who I think would say yes to me."

Nodding, Flitwick turned to the remainder of the class. "Well, let's clear these desks out of the way and I'll see if I can't teach you some of the old steps I used to know."

It turned out that Professor Flitwick wasn't half bad for being so short. He managed to give reasonable instructions and soon, the whole of the class was swinging around the classroom in time to the music. Esdras, who had paired up with Cho, added in an amusing little step where he spun them in midair. As they danced, the seeker laughed and looked up at the beater. "So, have you asked Katie yet?"

Esdras shook his head. "Not yet, I know she'll say yes, so I want to make it special. I need to ask for Professor Flitwick's help after class."

Cho shook her head and smiled. "You spoil her."

The Dementor laughed and spun them in midair again. "She deserves it. How about you? Any prospective dates?"

Cho smiled shyly and looked down. "Well, there is one. But I don't think he'd want to go with me."

Esdras, well versed in reading his friends by now, rolled his glowing eyes. However, his voice was humorless. "I'm sure Harry does. The question is if he'll have the guts to ask you."

Cho paled. "How did you know?"

The Dementor shook his head and spun her again.

It had been going on for days now, and Esdras was tired of it. Stopping by the Gryffindor table to spend time with Katie during meals meant that he was also privy to the qualms and complaints of his Gryffindor friends. And at this point, he was fed up with Harry and Ron. He had long since given up dropping hints to Harry that his task was far, far easier than he could have possibly imagined.

But the Dementor could not solve all the problems of the world. Cho had come into the common room earlier that day, positively exuberant that she had been asked to the ball by Cedric Diggory. So, as the Dementor sat beside Katie at the Gryffindor table, he couldn't help but notice the forlorn looking Harry who sat opposite him. He turned to face Katie and sighed. He spoke in Azkaban, which Harry had yet to try to learn. *"I tried to help him, I really did."*

Katie nodded sadly and replied similarly. *"I know you did, my dear. But asking out someone that you like is never easy."*

Esdras huffed. *"I had no problem with it. The only rough spot we had was when you found out I was a Dementor."*

The mortal laughed softly. *"Yes, but that didn't last very long. And besides, you have almost three centuries of extra experience on him. Asking girls out should be easier for you."*

The Dementor shook his head. *"Oh no, I'm not that experienced. And you never get used to rejection. Never."* He smiled and switched to English. "But, since we're talking about it, do you have a date to the ball yet?"

Katie shrugged her shoulders. "Well, you know how it is. There's this guy I'm seeing, but he hasn't said anything yet. I don't know what's going on with him." She sighed dramatically. "I may just have to go alone."

Esdras straightened up in mock indignation. "Well, we certainly can't have that. I must insist then that you accompany me to the Yule Ball."

She gasped in shock. "But, what about the guy I'm seeing?"

The Dementor reached into his robes and pulled out something which made all conversation at the table cease. In his hands, he held a beautiful rose that had been crafted from platinum. The artistry was exquisite, for the shining metal flower looked exactly like a real one. Esdras held the gift out to Katie. "Please, would you go with me to the Yule Ball?"

Katie took the shining flower and held it close to her heart. Her eyes were tearing up. "Of course I will."

As dinner let out, the Ravenclaw Quidditch team gathered around Esdras. Katie was walking ahead with Alicia and Angelina, holding her platinum rose out for all to see. Roger Davies let out a low whistle. "I take it you had some platinum left over from the first challenge?"

Esdras nodded. "I had a bit left over. Malachi took the rest of it back but I kept part of a bar for this."

Cho smirked. "Is that why you were waiting to ask Katie?"

The Dementor smiled and nodded. "Professor Flitwick is very good at metalwork, but I wanted it to be perfect. It took him a few days to do it. He refused to accept any payment, too. He said he was happy to do it and that he didn't get to practice enough. But the result is absolutely amazing."

They were interrupted by the platinum blonde form of Fleur Delacour stepping into their path. She had a shy look on her face as she addressed the glowing eyed Dementor. "Bon jour, Esdras. I was told

that you have not asked Katie to the ball. I was hoping perhaps you and I might go together?"

The Dementor was sincerely apologetic. "Fleur, I'm sorry. I just asked her tonight. I had a reason for waiting, and I'm sorry that you took it the wrong way." He looked around desperately. "Roger! Fleur, Roger here doesn't have a date. He's a very good friend of mine."

Roger, always quick on the uptake, straightened up and put on his best smile. "Actually, I'd be honored if I could have the pleasure of escorting you to the ball."

Fleur looked from Esdras to Roger, and then gave him an appraising glance. She was silent for a moment before extending a hand to Roger. "Very well, then, Roger. I shall go with you to the ball."

Roger took her hand and politely kissed it before she walked off. As the quarter Veela walked away, Roger turned to face his Dementor friend, a look of hero worship in his eyes. "That was bloody brilliant."

Esdras laughed and floated on. "You're telling me."

The Dementor was still laughing as he was plucked from midair before the other members of the Ravenclaw Quidditch team the moment he passed into the Entrance Hall. Katie Bell had a handful of his cloak and smiled to the other Ravenclaws. "Excuse me; I just need to borrow Esdras for a second." She pulled him down to eye level and whispered into his ear. "Trophy Room, as fast as you can."

Nodding quickly, Esdras wrapped his arms around her and vaulted them up into the air to the third floor. They sailed down the hall until they came to the heavy door protecting the room filled with shining mementos of days long past. The Dementor sat the mortal down and looked around. "And why did you want me to bring you back here?"

Katie grinned, the platinum rose in one hand and Esdras' shirtfront in the other. She pulled him down and kissed him deeply. "Isn't it obvious? I wanted to thank you properly."

Chapter 13 – Yule Ball

The Dementor sighed as he straightened the shoulder boards of his jacket for the tenth time. He had been waiting in the common room to escort Cho downstairs for almost fifteen minutes. He took the opportunity to check himself out in the floor length mirror that had been set up next to the door. The mirror whistled softly. “Very impressive, admiral.”

Esdras smiled. The Azkaban mess dress uniform was probably the only uniform in the mortal or magical world that was both handsome and comfortable. Instead of robes or cloaks, the dress uniform of the Azkaban Guard was completely different. The Dementor wore a pair of pressed black tuxedo pants with a double platinum braid and a black dress shirt with a high mandarin collar. Over the dress shirt was a long, hooded coat that fastened at the breast. It was adorned with wide platinum braids on the sleeves and shoulder boards with a single, platinum crescent moon indicating his rank as rear admiral. On his breast, he wore his guard badge and his service decorations and at his waist was his officer’s sword. Black leather gloves and glossy black dress shoes completed the outfit.

Spinning away from the mirror, Esdras floated to the dormitory stairwell and called up. “Move it or lose it Cho, we’ve got to start this thing!”

It was another few moments before Cho, clad in beautiful teal dress robes, descended the staircase. She looked positively giddy as she curtsied. “Sorry to keep you waiting, Lord Admiral.” She regarded him curiously for a moment. “You look older.”

Esdras smiled and bowed before offering his arm to her. As she took it, he led her to the door. “I’ve been working on modifying my animagus form to account for mortal aging, I should look about fifteen now. Why you mortals have to make physical growth so difficult is beyond me.” He shook his head playfully. “Now, Roger has already gone ahead to pick up Fleur. Katie will be meeting me downstairs, so we need to hurry.”

Cho smiled and nodded as they passed through the door and into the hall. "I don't think I've ever been so excited about anything before in my life."

The Dementor laughed as they came to the vacant stairwell. He places his arms around Cho's waist as she placed her arms around his neck and he quickly floated them both down towards the Entrance Hall. "I'll admit, I've been to some important banquets before where I've had to dress up, but I'm actually looking forward to this. I think I'm going to have fun."

Cho smiled and stepped away as their feet hit the ground. "I'm glad, Esdras." She looked over and spotted Cedric, who waved to her. Cho laughed nervously and leaned in, placing a soft kiss on Esdras' cheek. "Save a dance for your teammate, will you?"

The Dementor nodded and waved to Cedric before turning around to scan the Entrance Hall. A quartet of hooded black forms caught his eye, and he floated over. Three of the four snapped to attention and saluted as he approached, the last one curtsied gracefully. Esdras sighed and returned the salutes. "*At ease, captain, commander, lieutenant. Christine, lovely to see you.*"

His fellow officers were all dressed in the Azkaban dress uniform, their shoulder boards and coat sleeves indicating their various ranks. Stephanie Trieste, naturally, wore a long, flowing black skirt with her uniform. Christine Reaping wore a very nice black silk gown that was flatteringly cut to highlight her impossibly narrow waist. Around her neck was a lovely fire emerald necklace. Overtop of all of this, she wore a beautiful silk cloak with graceful patterns embroidered in silver thread.

Aaron and Christine Reaping stood with Malachi DeCay and Stephanie Trieste. The latter two were standing very close together and Esdras raised an eyebrow. "*Plans for the evening, Malachi?*"

The commander laughed quietly and put an arm around the lieutenant. "*Well, sir, things have been going well.*"

Esdras nodded. *"I know, Aaron has told me as much. You two enjoy yourselves tonight."* He turned to face the Reapings. *"Where are the cloaklings tonight?"*

Christine inclined her hood in the direction of the town. *"Sasha flew in a few days ago for Christmas, so she's watching them tonight. Will you and Katie be coming over tomorrow for dinner?"*

The admiral nodded. *"Of course, we wouldn't miss it for the world."* He looked around. *"Where is everyone else?"*

Aaron shrugged. *"The Mauls couldn't make it; Sara is only a month old and still too young to be left with a babysitter. The Transoms declined and said that this kind of party was for 'the youthful and those who didn't need sleep.' And the Kirins couldn't come because Alphonse came down with the cloak pox."*

Esdras shivered. *"Poor kid. I remember I itched for weeks when I got it."*

Aaron nodded. *"And I remember you gave it to me."*

The admiral rolled his eyes. *"It was hardly on purpose."*

heir discussion of events centuries past was interrupted when a very flustered Ludo Bagman, dressed in bright purple, ran square into the floating forms. He looked up, startled at the sight of the pitch black hoods, and then relaxed. "My apologies." He smiled broadly at the four Dementors, but still looked distracted. "I'm glad to see you were all able to come. You've done so much to help with the setup of the tournament, inviting you all to the Yule Ball was the least we could do."

Esdras nodded and answered for his colleagues. "Thank you, Mr. Bagman. Now, what's wrong?"

Ludo ran a hand through his hair and sighed. "The Weird Sisters just flooded us, they've been held up by Magical Customs. They were very vague, but it was something about the lead singer's pet. They'll need at least an hour or two to work it out and the dance starts in fifteen minutes."

There was a second's pause before Esdras turned to Aaron. He could tell that his old friend was thinking the same thing. *"Do you think the Mauls could look after Jacob and Calla?"*

Aaron was already in battle mode. *"I'll Floo them and find out. I'll work out the details."* He pointed to the stairwell behind them. *"You have places you need to be, my Lord."*

Esdras turned as the four Dementors behind him rushed off with Ludo Bagman in tow. Descending the staircase before him, dressed in beautiful, flowing forest green silk dress robes, was his Katie. Her hair had been curled into delicate ringlets and was held back with the fire emerald clips from a Christmas ago. The fire emerald necklace, Esdras' gift to her last year, graced her neck. This year's gift, matching fire emerald earrings, dangled from her ears. The glow of the stones matched the glow of the chandeliers on her gown. His eyes saw nothing else as she came to the base of the stairs and walked quickly towards him. He held out a gloved hand for her, which she took, and he shook his head in amazement. "So beautiful...so very beautiful."

Katie smiled a shy smile and leaned up onto her tiptoes to softly kiss her beloved. "So handsome...so very handsome."

Esdras smiled and wrapped an arm around her narrow waist. "We're a perfect match, then."

As the champions opened the dance, it was easy to tell which ones were and weren't comfortable. Esdras and Katie positively glowed as they danced together, their eyes never leaving the other. Every so often, they would leave the floor as Esdras gracefully floated them through the air. Harry and Parvati, however, while dancing quite well with each other, rarely made eye contact and simply looked uncomfortable during the whole of the dance.

When the dance finally ended, Esdras and Katie were the last to break apart. He looked reluctantly at her and whispered into her ear. "Will you excuse me for just a second? I have to make an introduction."

Katie nodded, and the Dementor floated through the crowd to where the stage had been set up. Aaron, who had watched the dance, floated along beside him and gestured enthusiastically to the stage. *"We're ready. Some of the men in the Eighth Infantry have started up a band, so they'll be backing her up. She'll sing a few sets until the Weird Sisters get here. You have no idea how grateful Bagman is."*

Esdras smirked. *"Oh, I have some idea. Those mortals would be lost without us."* He floated up onto the stage and stood before the magical microphone on its stand. At his cue, bright, upbeat music started playing. The crowd hushed and Esdras smiled at the crowd. *"Everyone, we have a real treat for you tonight. While the Weird Sisters have been delayed for a few hours, you all have the pleasure of being the first mortals ever to enjoy the greatest singer in all of Azkaban. Ladies and gentlemen, straight from the North Mountain of Azkaban, I give you...Sasha Reaping!"*

The curtain pulled away to reveal a beautiful, slender Dementress dressed in a low cut, form fitting, but tasteful black gown. The hood of her cloak covered her face as she floated up to the microphone. In English, she called out to the crowd. *"Hello, Hogwarts!"*

The majority of the crowd did not know how to take this, but those well accustomed to Dementors cheered loudly. Esdras patted his goddaughter on the shoulder. *"Let's get this party started."*

Sasha watched her godfather float off the stage and signaled to the band of Dementors behind her. The guitar, bass, and drums struck up the tune, and she began to sing in Azkabaaner.

"Don't make fun of it! Don't destroy it! Don't cheapen it!"

That one thing everyone has that they won't give up.

Only love! Only dreams! Only you!

Those are the only things I won't let go, ever.

What do you want? What do you want to do? Where do you want to go?

Grab what you want, cut through the darkness, and run through the night!"

On the dance floor below, a number of students looked on in awe as the Dementress sang. In Azkabaaner, the lyrics flowed perfectly with the music. The music was fast and driving and had a beat that was easy to move to. Most of the Hogwarts students took to the catchy tune and began to dance. By the second verse, the entire dance floor was moving in time to the Azkaban band. Esdras floated his way through the crowd to Katie and wrapped his arms around her, moving in time with her. "I told you she was good!"

Katie laughed, shouting to be heard over the music. "She's better than good, she's amazing!"

Sasha had been on stage for nearly two hours and was still going strong, singing a mix of songs in Azkabaaner and English. Katie, however, thanks to the three inch stilettos she was wearing, needed a break. She had let Esdras loose to dance with whomever he pleased as she relaxed at a table and rested her feet. She smiled when Harry and Ron joined her. "Hullo, you two. Where are your dates?"

The dejected pair pointed in various directions to indicate that both the Patil twins were dancing with other guys. Katie sighed. Harry leaned back and nursed his bottle of butterbeer. "How about you? Where's Esdras?"

Katie pointed across the dance floor to where Esdras was currently dancing with Ginny. She ticked off names on her fingers. "He's danced with Cho, Hermione, Loony Lovegood, Christine Reaping, Stephanie Trieste, and now Ginny." At her companions' surprised looks, she elaborated. "In Azkaban culture, it's considered bad manners if you don't dance with your friends at a party. I've danced with both Aaron and Malachi, and once the Weird Sisters get here, Esdras will dance with Sasha."

Harry shook his head bitterly. "It's so easy for him. He has an excuse."

Katie laughed. "It's not just that, he's comfortable asking his friends to dance. Either of you could do the same. The worst they can do is say no."

The song ended, and it was a few moments before Esdras glided over with Ginny at his side. He thanked her and Neville both before gliding over to the table and sitting beside Katie. "Feeling better?"

Katie nodded. "Much, I just needed to get out of these shoes for a while."

Esdras leaned in conspiratorially, gathering Harry and Ron in the gossip. "I saw Roger and Fleur heading out towards the garden while I was dancing with Christine. They still haven't come back."

Katie laughed loudly and leaned against Esdras. "I know someone who will be bragging tomorrow." She sighed happily and looked deep into his eyes. "You've aged well, Esdras."

The Dementor smirked slightly. "Just a few modifications to the animagus spell, I tell you, nothing more. I can't go around looking like I'm fourteen forever. No one would take me seriously."

The mortal laughed softly. "I would." She gave him an innocent smile. "Will you get me a drink?"

The Dementor nodded. "Butterbeer?"

"Please."

Harry and Ron sighed and rose, saying their goodbyes to Katie before disappearing into the crowd and leaving her alone at the table. She was not alone for too long, as a tall Durmstrang student took the seat which Esdras had just vacated. He smiled brightly. "Good evening, I am Ivan. Would you care to dance?"

Katie grimaced at the scent of alcohol coming off him, but managed to smile graciously. "No, my boyfriend has just gone to get me a drink. But thank you for asking."

The Durmstrang rose, placing a hand on her shoulder and swaying slightly. "Please, just one dance. It will be enjoyable."

Katie moved to brush his hand away, but flinched when his grip tightened. "I said no. Esdras will be back soon, so you would do well to..." She gasped as he pulled her up. "Stop this."

Ivan smirked triumphantly. "No one says no to me."

He was interrupted by a tap on his shoulder. He turned to face the chest of a nine foot tall, silk clad, hooded terror. Christine Reaping's voice was icy cold. "I believe the lady told you no."

People would debate whether or not the intoxicated student realized who or what he was up against. Ivan glared at the Dementress and tossed Katie aside as he brought his hand up to strike her. Christine effortlessly caught his hand and squeezed, the bones in his hand breaking audibly. The Durmstrang student fell to his knees and screamed, causing all attention in the immediate area to be drawn to them. The sight of a Dementress hovering menacingly over a mortal was more than enough to cause every wand in the room to be drawn.

Mortal and Dementor were in a standoff which lasted until Albus Dumbledore and Barty Crouch plowed their way through the armed crowd. Crouch scanned the situation and looked at the fallen student. "You see, Albus! Their kind is violent, nothing more than destructive terrors. I knew you were wrong to invite them."

Following in their wake, two nine foot tall forms appeared behind the adults. Esdras and Aaron took one look at the situation and flew overtop of Crouch and Dumbledore to stand protectively in front of their better halves. Aaron held his wand in his left hand and his officer's sword in his right. "Any who attack her will die."

Dumbledore raised a calming hand. "Captain Reaping, I'm certain we can come to the bottom of this in a reasonable manner. Mrs. Reaping, Katie, what happened?"

Christine concentrated on calming down her husband while Katie carefully explained the situation. When she had finished, Esdras stared at the Durmstrang who was still cradling his broken hand. He

drew his sword from its sheath and raised it high above his head. "You die."

Ivan pitifully covered his head and closed his eyes, shaking as he waited for the sword to fall. It never did. Katie had carefully grasped Esdras' elbow and was keeping him from bringing the sword down. *"All is well, my darling Lord of Azkaban. I'd rather us enjoy the rest of the night. This creature is not worth our time."*

Esdras again considered the fallen form beside him. He nodded and gripped the Durmstrang by the shirtfront, lifting him off his feet. The Dementor pulled back his hood with his other hand so the drunken student could get a good look at his face. His voice was icy and thick with a harsh Azkabaaner accent. "You are lucky that Katie has such pull on me, or I would be sending you home in a casket. You will not touch her, you will not look at her, and you will not speak to her. Disobey me and you forfeit your life. Agreed?"

Ivan nodded rapidly. "I agree."

The Dementor smiled as best he could. "Good. Now go back to your ship and sober up." He drew back and effortlessly threw the student, arcing him the twenty five feet into the Entrance Hall where he landed with a crash. The entire party was still looking at him, so Esdras motioned to Sasha, who had stopped singing during the stand off. She started back up with her song, and the crowd slowly began to disperse.

Katie smirked at Esdras, her hands on her hips. "Methinks you're taking this champion thing too far."

Sheathing his sword, Esdras shook his head. "I will defend you just as Aaron will defend Christine and Veras will defend Kayla." He took her hand and placed it over his chest. "That is our way."

Katie smiled and leaned in to kiss him softly. When they finally broke, she looked curiously at him. "Did you get me that butterbeer?"

The arrival of the Weird Sisters infused new life into the Yule Ball, allowing the party to continue on well into the night. The Dementors,

however, did not stay that long. The Reapings made their apologies and left before midnight to collect their children and put them to bed. Sasha left a short while later, having danced a few times to the mortal music with her godfather. And when Malachi and Stephanie left, Esdras and Katie had playfully made bets as to whose home the two would find their way to.

At about one in the morning, Esdras felt Katie tug at his sleeve. Her eyes were tired and she had a soft smile on her face. "I think I'm about done for the night."

The Dementor nodded. "So am I." He gathered up his cope from his chair and put an arm around her as they headed for the door.

They were intercepted by Cedric just before they reached the Entrance Hall. He smiled to them both. "Leaving so soon?"

Esdras laughed. "Even Dementors need sleep, Cedric. Just make sure Cho gets back safely."

Cedric nodded. "Of course, Esdras." He leaned in conspiratorially. "Oh, and I've already told this to Harry, but if you haven't figured out the egg yet, you might want to try taking a bath with it. I'd recommend the prefect's bathroom, the password is pine fresh. Anyway, I have to get back to Cho. Good night, you two."

The Dementor watched as he walked away, and then sighed. "Take a bath with it? Yeah right, the last thing I need is to turn myself into an ice cube."

Katie pulled him out into the Entrance Hall, smiling seductively all the way. "Don't worry about it, love. I'm sure if you ask politely enough, someone will agree to help you out. In fact, she may even let you watch." She looked nervously up at the stairwell. "Now, since I don't think my roommates would appreciate visitors at this late hour, shall we go back to your place?"

Esdras paled slightly. "Katie, you know we can't."

The nervous smile only grew as she pressed herself against him. "I don't see why not. You are the only student with the luxury of not

having any roommates.” She captured his lips in a kiss that lasted for minutes but was far too short. “Your mind says no, but your body says yes.”

The Dementor closed his eyes and concentrated, speaking slowly. “I don’t have roommates for a reason. Without the protection afforded by the spells on my cloaks or mortal clothing, you would freeze or even worse, I could feed off you. I can’t let that happen.”

To prove his point he took her hand and slipped it through the space between the buttons of his shirt. To her warm mortal skin, his was like ice. Katie sighed and leaned her head against his chest. “Is there no way, then? We can’t be...closer?”

Esdras leaned in, resting his head atop hers. “There is one way, but it is ancient Azkaban magic. You would have to be sure that it is what you wanted. And even if you were, it would take months to prepare.”

Katie nodded against his chest, gripping his shirt tight in both hands. “I’m sure it’s what I want. I want you.”

The Dementor nodded and lifted them both into the air. He spoke quietly as they ascended. “Then I will begin making the preparations. But for tonight, I think I can make room for you if you promise to behave yourself.”

The mortal grinned and buried her head deeper into his chest so that her reply was muffled. “For now...”

Chapter 14 – New Years in New Demnin

Two days after the Yule Ball, a charming little note appeared on the bulletin boards of four Hogwarts houses. Similar notes also found their way to the Beauxbatons carriage and the Durmstrang ship. They were simple in design, featuring a few finely drawn cloaked figures wearing party hats and plain black text.

The New Demnin Town Council

Welcomes Our Mortal Friends To

The First Annual New Years Bonfire

60 Varaldes (31 December), Treaty Year 1022

Festivities start at 9:00 pm

Boats available from Hogwarts starting at 8:45pm

Plenty of food and drinks!

Esdras was pleased that the initial reactions were positive. As he floated down for breakfast, he was met by a unanimous response. His fellow Ravenclaws would be joining the party. He grinned happily and made his way to the Gryffindor table to take a seat beside Katie. The blonde haired mortal smiled and leaned over to give him a kiss. “So I see you managed to make the New Demnin trip happen?”

The Dementor nodded. “It was actually rather easy. I think how we all got along at the Yule Ball helped Karkaroff and Maxime see that Dementors and mortals can at least get along together for a few hours. And Dumbledore didn’t need any convincing. He’s already told me that he’ll be there and will supply his Patronus to feed us.”

Katie nodded. “Well that’s good. Something for everyone then.” She switched to Azkabaaner so that they could have some privacy. “*What do you want to do about the egg?*”

The Dementor nabbed a piece of bacon from the table and shrugged. “*I’ll definitely need your help for that. But if my asking will cause any*

problems with your loyalty to Harry, you don't have to help. I can get Cho or Roger to help me out."

The mortal scoffed. *"Like hell, I may be loyal to my housemates, but I'm also loyal to my boyfriend. Meet me at the prefect's bathroom tonight after dinner. Bring the egg with you."* She took a sip of her pumpkin juice and continued on casually. *"And don't wear too much, because I won't."*

Esdras really wasn't sure what to expect as he floated towards the prefect's bathroom. Externally, he looked perfectly normal, dressed in a normal black cloak. However, beneath the cloak, he wore a white cotton bathrobe. He carried with him a satchel containing the egg and his towel, which was really unnecessary because he didn't plan on getting wet.

As he approached the door, he saw the smiling form of Katie waiting for him, similarly attired. She uttered the password and the door opened to admit them. As they took in the ornate surroundings, Katie whistled softly. "So this is how the other half lives. I could get used to this."

The Dementor floated up to inspect the chandelier. "This is really nice. Almost makes me wish I could take baths without freezing." He floated back down. "But cold showers are just as refreshing."

Katie shivered at this and started turning the various taps, slowly filling the great tub. "Maybe for you, but I prefer something warmer." She looked to his satchel. "Did you remember the egg?"

Esdras nodded and pulled out the golden ovoid. He set his bag down and proceeded to take off his cloak, revealing the fuzzy white robe. He turned to face Katie when she started laughing. "What?"

The mortal shook her head quickly, her voice still light and breathless. "Oh, it's nothing, love. It's just that you look cute in a bathrobe."

The Dementor huffed. "Cute is not a word easily applied to Dementors. You, however, look positively stunning in yours." He

proceeded to fold his cloak, after an appropriate pause he spoke again. "Of course, you'd look better out of it."

Katie smirked playfully and lowered the robe to expose a bare shoulder. "Patience, Lord Admiral." It was another moment before the tub filled completely, and Katie turned off the taps. With no fanfare, she promptly stripped off her robe and stepped into the warm water. When she was covered up to her neck in bubbles, she turned to face the shell shocked Esdras. "You going to hand over that egg, or just keep staring at me? Because I don't mind either way."

Esdras shook his head, regaining his composure. He floated on his belly a few feet over the surface of the water and handed the egg down to Katie. She placed it under the surface of the water and looked at it expectantly. Esdras shrugged. "Try opening it."

Katie nodded and flipped off the lid of the egg. They could hear the strange sound coming from within it still, but it was muffled by the water. Katie shook her head. "Now what?"

Rolling onto his back, Esdras sighed. "I swear I've heard this before. I just can't remember when."

Katie huffed and leaned back, dipping her head into the water to get her hair wet. Her ears fell below the surface of the water for just a second and she froze. "Esdras...I hear something."

The Dementor almost fell out of the air as he turned to face her. "What? What do you hear?"

Katie held up a hand and submerged below the surface of the water. She was down for almost half a minute before she came back up. She closed her eyes and concentrated on remembering what she had heard. "Come seek us where our voices sound, we cannot sing above the ground, and while you're searching, ponder this: we've taken what you'll sorely miss. An hour long you'll have to look, and to recover what we took. But past an hour - the prospect's black, too late, it's gone, it won't come back." She shook her head. "That's all there was, it just kept repeating."

Esdras groaned. "I knew I had heard this before. It's Mermish. It sounds awful when spoken above water. I had to deal with some Merpeople back in the early 1940s when the International Confederation of Wizards seized Grindelwald's assets. They were responsible for bringing a few million galleons worth of gold up from a lake in Germany."

Katie nodded and swam over to the side of the tub, idly leaning against the wall. "So Merpeople are going to steal something valuable of yours, and you'll have an hour to get it back."

The Dementor nodded, running a hand through his hair. "This is the worst case scenario I was imagining when Cedric told me to do this. A Dementor going underwater is practically impossible."

The mortal cast a curious eye at her floating love. "Practically?"

Esdras nodded. "Quicksilver project Waterstorm."

The lake was still and calm as no less than two dozen boats made their way across the frigid waters to the other side, where an incredibly large bonfire could be seen burning between the trees. Katie, in the lead boat, looked over to the form floating beside her. "*What is the Waterstorm project? You never did tell me.*"

Esdras smirked. "*I would have told you, but you chose that moment to get out of the tub. I was a bit distracted.*" He glided closer. "*The Waterstorm project is like the Firestorm project, except designed for water use. It's designed to allow the wearer to operate without harm in an underwater environment.*"

Katie nodded. "*So it's like muggle scuba gear?*"

The Dementor looked impressed. "*You've been paying attention in Muggle Studies. But it's nothing like that. It's only designed to protect the wearer from the water and keep it from freezing around him. There's no breathing device associated, since we can hold our breath for weeks.*"

The mortal nodded in understanding. Their conversation was interrupted as their boats made the final approach to the New Demnin harbor. Katie helped Esdras get the people out of the boats and onto the newly constructed dock. "Okay, everyone hurry up. There are more people waiting back at Hogwarts, no need to keep them from the party." When the crowd was unloaded, the boats began their float back to Hogwarts to pick up another load of students. Katie followed the floating Esdras up the dock to dry land. A quick walk up a wide path, and she was confronted with a charming sight. "Oh, it's so lovely!"

The town of New Demnin had grown since its original inception. What had once been a purely underground Dementor settlement now had a High Street, with a few brightly lit shops that were obviously open to do business with the mortal student crowd. A quick look at some of the dual language signs revealed a cloak shop, a Quidditch shop, an apothecary, and a restaurant which proudly claimed to have the freshest fish and chips in all of Britain. Esdras looked around; the streets were filled with the dispersing student crowd, Dementors, and many of the residents from Hogsmeade, all looking forward to the late night festivities.

The Dementor smiled happily and took Katie's gloved hand, leading her towards the immense bonfire near the great cavernous entrance to the underground town. "We've done a lot to this place. It's good to get to show it off."

Katie was soon tugging on Esdras' hand, pulling him to a stand which had fresh green mint tea, warm butterbeers, and hot potatoes that had been baked in the great bonfire, all free for friends. With a potato in one hand and a butterbeer in the other, she turned to face her companion. "So, have you given any thought to what the Merpeople might take?"

Esdras looked thoughtfully into the fire and sipped his mint tea. "A little. The only truly important possessions I have are the Glaive of Silence, which no one but I can wield, the crown jewels, which are locked up in Gringotts, and anything that reminds me of you."

Katie blushed. "I rank alongside the crown jewels?"

He turned to face her. "The value of an item is measured by the memories attached. The Glaive and the crown jewels are memories of my family. So yes, you're rank right up there."

She busied herself picking at the label on the butterbeer bottle. When she finally spoke, her voice was soft and shy. "I know exactly how you feel, love."

Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Doctor Transom and Captain Kirin, both of whom saluted before bowing to the Lord Admiral. The doctor was the first to speak. "*Good evening, young prince. Introduce this old Dementor to your young friend here.*"

Esdras rolled his eyes. "*Katie Bell, meet Doctor Michaelis Transom, who continues to believe he is old, despite all evidence to the contrary. You already know Captain Kirin.*"

Katie smiled and shook the offered hands. "*Good evening doctor, captain, and happy New Year.*"

The doctor bowed politely, as did the captain, but Kira quickly turned her attention to the admiral. "*Lord Admiral, I don't mean to be rude, but Alphonse is still ill with the cloak pox and I should get back to him. Doctor Transom said you wished to see me?*"

Esdras nodded, quickly adopting a businesslike tone and leading Kira away from the others to speak privately with her. "*Yes, Kira. Katie and I have managed to figure out the clue that was left during the last Triwizard challenge. I need you to secure the Quicksilver Waterstorm project for me.*"

Kira's hood arched up in surprise. "*The Waterstorm project is currently under the control of the 177th Research Division. I'll need the authorization of a vice admiral or higher to transfer it to my division.*"

The admiral nodded. "*I understand. You must contact Admiral Grim immediately; he's a full admiral and is loyal to the royal house. I'll alert him to our need for the Waterstorm project in the morning. I don't believe he'll have any objections to transferring another of the Quicksilvers to my command, given the circumstances.*" Esdras

narrowed his hood. *"This is a good excuse for us to begin consolidating the Quicksilver projects again. I intend to take it."*

The captain nodded quickly. *"I understand, but are you expecting trouble, sir?"*

Esdras shook his head. *"No, Kira, but you can never be too careful. I've never felt comfortable having the Quicksilver projects spread out far and wide."* He patted her on the shoulder and sighed. *"Now, I'm sorry to have taken you away from your family. Please tell Alphonse I hope he feels better soon."*

Kira nodded. *"Of course, sir. And happy New Year."*

The admiral dismissed his subordinate and turned to where Katie had been joined by an all too familiar Dementor family. As he approached, a small cloaked form shot from his mother's arms and latched onto Esdras' neck. *"Lord Esdras, there are mortals everywhere!"*

Esdras laughed and hugged his godson tight. *"Yes, Jacob, there are. Are you being nice to them?"*

Jacob nodded, his hood wide in amazement. *"Yes, Lord Esdras. The one with the scar on his head cast his Patronus for us to feed on. It was a stag!"*

Esdras stifled a laugh and looked to Aaron, who was also trying to keep from laughing by adjusting Calla's winter cloak to cover her better. It was obvious that both had thought back to the same moment last year when they had experienced the power of the Potter Patronus firsthand. Esdras nodded to his godchild. *"Yes, it is a very powerful stag. Your father and I have seen it before."*

He handed off the young cloakling to Christine and shifted into his mortal form before wrapping an arm around Katie. *"Well, if you all will excuse me, all my business here is done. Katie, what do you say we enjoy ourselves?"*

Katie smiled, putting her arm around Esdras and leading him towards the shops on the High Street. *"Sounds good, we can start by seeing what this town has to offer in terms of shopping."*

The bonfire burned brightly as the hands of the clock set up by the cavern entrance neared midnight. Beauxbaton, Durmstrang, Hogwarts, Hogsmeade, and New Demnin all blended together on the street and around the great fire as the year approached its end. Esdras and Katie stood with Cho and Cedric a comfortable distance away from the glowing flames when they first noticed a change in the weather. Katie looked up and smiled happily. "Snow!"

Sure enough, the skies had opened up, and a new snowfall had started, intent on coating the town of New Demnin in a beautiful white glaze. Esdras lifted the hood of his cloak and held his cup of mint tea closer. "This evening couldn't get any more perfect."

Somewhere in the background, a loud chorus of voices had begun a countdown. Mortal and Dementor ignored them, caught in their own little snow filled world. Katie looked up into his hooded eyes and smiled. "Are you sure?"

The Dementor shook his head. "Not anymore."

Katie laughed and looked up to the clock. "It's almost midnight. The person you kiss is the person you'll be with for the rest of the year."

Esdras leaned in, dangerous close as the voices in the background reached the single digits. "Well, there's only one person that could be."

Their lips met, and the falling snow did nothing to chill the pair as the crowd around them burst into cheers.

Chapter 15 – The Second Challenge

The evening before the second challenge was scheduled to begin, Esdras made his way to the command bunker. Captain Kirin had sent him a priority vulture, indicating that the Waterstorm cloak was ready for his final approval. As he walked into the testing facility, he was met by a rather harried looking captain who quickly saluted. *“Lord Admiral, I’m glad you could make it.”*

Esdras returned the salute and put a hand on the captain’s back. *“Easy there, Kira. What’s going on?”*

Kira’s voice was genuinely relieved. *“It took almost a full month of end stage testing but we have it finished, sir. The Waterstorm cloak is ready.”* She gestured to a table in the center of the facility where a deep blue, almost black, cloak rested. *“There are just a few things you need to remember when using it.”*

Esdras lifted up the cloak and inspected it closely. The cloak was less cloak than it was bag. The fabric was sewn together at the bottom and long arms had been added to the sides to completely isolate the wearer from the water. When he was done, he folded it up and returned his attention to the captain. *“Tell me everything I need to know.”*

The captain nodded. *“We’ve managed to get the cloak close to the one hour mark, but it gets unreliable after fifty minutes. I wouldn’t recommend being in the water any longer than that. And if the fabric tears, you’ll have less than a minute to get out of the water before you freeze up. Also, we were unable to completely integrate the afterburner vents into the cloak. If you have to activate your afterburners underwater, you’ll need to keep them active until you’re above the surface, or the plasma vents will be open to the water and freeze you from the inside out.”*

The admiral sighed and looked at the garment again. *“Right, fifty minutes, avoid tears, and no afterburners unless absolutely necessary.”* He regarded the captain again. *“Kira, this is incredible work. I think you ought to take a few days leave after all this is over and spend time with your family. You of all people deserve it.”*

Kira bowed graciously. *"Thank you, Lord Admiral. Is there anything else that you will require for tomorrow?"*

Esdras thought for a second, and then nodded. *"I don't want you to think that I'm doubting your work, but please bring the Firestorm cloak along with you in the morning. In the unlikely event that this cloak fails, we'll need the Firestorm to unfreeze me."*

The captain nodded. *"I had already planned on that, sir. I may have faith in my work, but this is the first time a Dementor has even attempted to go below water. We haven't even had time for field trials on this cloak yet. I'll be happy if it doesn't fail right after you jump in."*

The admiral sighed. *"So will I, Kira. So will I."*

Esdras dismissed the captain and glided quickly from the research facility. He had promised Katie that he swing by the Gryffindor common room as soon as he was done. The trip across the frigid lake was uneventful and the water was smooth and glassy. He made his way into the castle and up to the portrait of the Fat Lady, who smiled as she acknowledged his guard badge and granted him entry.

He looked around, but the only person he saw was a slender redhead sitting by the fireplace. She looked up and smiled sadly. "You just missed her, Esdras. Professor McGonagall came by not ten minutes ago and told Katie to come with her."

The Dementor huffed slightly and leaned against the wall of the Gryffindor common room. Ginny smiled apologetically and shrugged her shoulders. Esdras looked around the room. "Did she say when she'd be back?"

Ginny shook her head. "No, she just left with Katie and said something about having to find Hermione and Ron, as well."

Esdras scratched the back of his head. "Well that's unusual. I hope everything's okay. If you should see her, tell her that I'll come by before breakfast tomorrow."

The redhead smiled and nodded. "I'll let her know the minute I see her. Good night, Esdras, and good luck tomorrow."

The next morning dawned bright and clear and cold. Esdras adjusted his cloak as he came down the stairs into the Ravenclaw common room and floated across towards the door. "I can't believe they expect us to do anything on or near the water in this weather." He looked around. "And where's Cho? She's usually up by now."

Roger rose from his chair by the fireplace and followed along behind the Dementor. "No clue. No one's seen her. She's probably gone to wish Cedric good luck before the challenge."

The Dementor looked concerned. "That's unusual. It's not like her to not tell us." Finally he just shrugged. "Oh well, I'm going to float over to Gryffindor and find Katie. I'll see you down at breakfast."

Roger nodded and waved as they split up, the mortal heading downstairs and the Dementor continuing down the hall towards the Gryffindor portrait hole. He smiled to the Fat Lady, but she simply held up a hand. "Don't even bother; she didn't come back in last night."

The Dementor cast the painting a questioning glance. "That's really unusual."

Before the painting could say anything more, Viktor Krum turned the corner at a dead run and skidded to a halt in front of the painting. He looked from Dementor to painting as he panted. "Have either of you seen Herm...Hermi..."

The Fat Lady saved the Durmstrang the trouble. "I'm sorry; she didn't come back last night either."

Esdras pulled Viktor away from the portrait and walked him down the hall. "You know something. Tell me."

Viktor quickly shook his head. "I swear I don't know anything. Hermioninny was supposed to meet me in the library before the challenge, but the only person in there was Harry, and he was asleep. I've been running around trying to find her."

The Dementor kicked the wall, cracking the stone. "Cloaks of the ancients, first Cho, then Katie, now Hermione... What the hell is going on around here?"

Both looked up when they heard a set of rapidly approaching footsteps. Cedric tore down the hall and came to a halt in front of them. "Esdras, there you are. Where's Cho?"

Esdras shook his head. "No idea, I thought she was with you." He groaned and rubbed his face with his hands. "This is the last thing we need; we've all lost our girlfriends right before the challenge."

All three paused at the word 'lost'. Cedric turned to Esdras. "And while you're searching, ponder this: we've taken what you'll surely miss."

Viktor looked concerned. "An hour long you'll have to look and to recover what we took."

Esdras refused to finish the verse, instead gripping his two fellow champions about the waist and floating them over the railing to freefall down the stairwell. He spat out an ancient curse. "*Son of a bitch must pay!*" The trio landed in the entrance hall and ran towards the open doors where the breakfast crowd was already chattering in anticipation of the day's event. Anxious discussion in the room ceased with a dark, echoing shout. "Crouch, you rat bastard! Give me back my girlfriend!"

The well dressed wizard sitting at the High Table barely had enough time to duck before the Reductor curse tore through the back of his chair, turning it to splinters. When his head finally popped back up, the Dementor had closed the distance and was narrowing his hood at him from the other end of the table. Crouch's voice wavered as he spoke. "Mister Demnin, this kind of behavior is not tolerat..."

Esdras leveled his wand. "Crucio." Screams of ultimate suffering filled the room as the Dementor carefully applied the curse to his victim. "Now, Barty, we're going to have a nice little talk about where my friends are. Won't that be fun?"

Before he could get an answer, Esdras was blindsided by a shining silver phoenix and slammed into the far wall. Dumbledore stood with his wand pointed directly at the Dementor, bidding the Patronus to hold him down. "Mister Demnin, I know that the Unforgivables are legal for your use, but I request that you refrain from using them in my school. Also, Miss Bell would not be pleased to see you acting in this manner. I believe she'd much prefer that you were well prepared to rescue her."

The headmaster lowered his wand and the Patronus disappeared. Esdras glared first at Dumbledore, then at Crouch again before returning his wand to his pocket. "Very well." He pointed to Crouch, who again cowered. "But if any harm comes to her, your suffering will know no end."

The five champions all stood together on the pier over the lake. All had stripped down to their swimming gear except for Esdras, who had the blue-black Waterstorm cloak over his black swimming trunks. He raised the hood and lowered the clear face shield to create a watertight seal around his body. When he turned to face Cedric, the Hufflepuff startled. "When did you get blue eyes, Esdras?"

The Dementor leaned over the edge of the pier and looked at his reflection in the lake. Sure enough, the cloak had turned his eyes to a glowing deep blue. He sighed. "I really have to talk to Kira about these side effects."

As he rose, Ludo Bagman cast a sonorous charm and addressed the crowd. "Ladies and gentlemen, the second task of the Triwizard Tournament will take one hour. Competitors have that long to find their hostage at the bottom of the lake and return them to the surface. We will begin with the sounding of the cannon."

Esdras leaned forward, eyeing the water below him nervously. He looked behind him to where Kira, Aaron, Malachi, and Stephanie all looked on anxiously. Kira spoke quietly to her admiral. *"Remember, my Lord, fifty minutes and one time afterburners. You will be unable to breathe underwater, and the face shield will prevent you from being able to speak to the others."*

He nodded and sighed and whispered a small prayer as he turned to face the water again. "*Gods of Azkaban, protect me.*"

The cannon fired.

With the bravery afforded him by almost two centuries in the Azkaban Guard, Esdras jumped with his fellow champions. As he hit the water and sunk below the surface, he panicked for only a few seconds until he realized that he was unencumbered by ice. The Dementor looked up, and saw four hooded faces looking down at him. He flashed them a thumbs up before descending, and following his fellow champions through the lake.

As the first Dementor ever to go underwater, Esdras decided that swimming was not terribly different from flying. He found that his float bladders acted as ballast tanks, allowing him to control all directions of travel. He decided to take it easy at first, so as not to push the limits of the Waterstorm cloak. So Esdras kept an even pace with Harry, who had somehow grown gills and webbed appendages in order to complete the task.

The pair swam silently through the darkening water. Ahead of them was an odd looking kelp patch, in which the Dementor could see floating black forms. Professor Lupin had taught him well, and Esdras prepared himself for the onslaught of Grindylows. He narrowed his glowing blue eyes and accelerated with his float bladders. As the first of the Grindylows came from the seaweed, Esdras grabbed it by the neck and pulled, severing head from body. The other creatures watched in horror as their comrade's body fell calmly into the darkness, allowing the Dementor to pass unobstructed in their hurry to avoid him.

Once clear of the kelp field, Esdras pushed his float bladders, moving through the water at his top speed of fifty miles per hour. He made good time and soon, in the distance, could see a pale glow. Only mortal souls glowed in Dementor eyes, so he angled himself toward the light and kept swimming. It was only a few more minutes before he passed overtop of a rather quaint looking town made from stone and thatched water plants, obviously the Mermish village. And ahead

of him, asleep, and tied to chains anchored to the lakebed, were five mortals.

Esdras rushed forward, quickly inspecting each one and coming to a halt at Katie. She seemed no worse for wear, and he shook her, trying to wake her up. When she didn't respond, the Dementor looked around to the other four. He recognized all but one; Hermione would belong to Viktor, Cho to Cedric, and Ron to Harry. The little blonde girl on the end was therefore Fleur's, probably a family member.

A motion to his left caught his attention and Esdras turned, wand drawn, to see Harry. Once the mortal was close enough, the Dementor gestured to the five and pointed to Ron, Harry nodded in reply. He pointed to his wrist, where a watch would be, then again to the five, and Harry nodded yet again. They would both wait.

Waiting at the bottom of a lake, surrounded by water, in an untested, top secret experimental cloak, was a truly unnerving experience for a Dementor. It seemed to take hours for Viktor, then Cedric, to come along. Finally, Esdras tapped Harry on the shoulder and pointed to his wrist, they could wait for Fleur no longer. Harry nodded, and moved to cut the chain securing Ron to the lakebed.

Esdras cast a quick Reductor on the chain that held Katie, and then moved on to the blonde girl with Harry. It was then that all hell broke loose. A Merman, bearing a spear, swam out of nowhere and pointed the weapon at Esdras. The Dementor grabbed the business end of the spear, pulled the Merman in, and head butted him. The unconscious water dweller floated slowly down to the ground below. His friends didn't seem to like this and swam out of the shadows, quickly surrounded the Dementor, and jabbing at him with their spears.

Esdras' first clue to trouble was that the water began to crystallize around him; it looked just like the inside of a snow globe. He looked down and saw a narrow rend in the fabric of the Waterstorm cloak. Cursing in his mind, he reached into his sleeve, pulling out the Glaive of Silence and sweeping it in wide arcs, dispersing the Merpeople and inflicting some nasty looking gashes on some. He floated quickly

to Harry, always moving to keep the ice from freezing on him and hindering mobility. He pointed to Katie, then himself, then up, then back down, then to Harry. The meaning, he hoped, was clear. He would take Katie to the surface, then return to help.

Harry must have understood, because he cut the chain to the blonde girl and nodded. Esdras took Katie in his arms and inaudibly called forth his inferior afterburners. The Waterstorm effect carried through to them, too, for the four ichor plasma flames burning about his waist shone a brilliant silvery blue.

The four afterburners meant that when he exited the water, Esdras was traveling at about two hundred fifty miles per hour. That made the quarter mile trip back to the pier incredibly short. When he finally landed, he placed Katie down on the dock and looked around. Viktor, Hermione, Cedric, Cho, and Fleur were already back and wrapped in towels. Fleur was crying madly and rushed to Esdras. "Esdras, please, you must elp my sister Gabrielle. I will do anything, just elp her."

The Dementor nodded, shrugging out of the damaged Waterstorm cloak before turning to face his subordinates. "*Kira, I need the Firestorm cloak.*"

Captain Kirin shook her head. "*I don't recommend that, Esdras. We haven't tested the Firestorm for water use. There's no telling if it'll protect you or not.*"

Esdras shouted. "*I didn't ask for your opinion, Captain, I gave you an order. Harry and Ron and Gabrielle are still down there and I'm not leaving them behind!*"

Kira nodded and reluctantly handed the admiral the red black cloak. As he secured it around his neck, he turned his now red eyes to Fleur. "Look after Katie, and I'll look after your sister."

Esdras fired his superior dorsal afterburners, the twin silver flames from his shoulders carrying him into the air with an unholy shriek. He activated the Firestorm cloak and the bright red flames covered his body as he flew. Hovering high above the lake, Esdras could see Harry below the water, dragging the two unconscious forms back the

way he came. He was currently near the Grindylow infested kelp patch. The Dementor turned down into a steep dive and prayed for his plan to work. When he hit the water, he passed effortlessly below the surface, but the water around him roiled as the flames heated the liquid to steam.

Below him, he could tell that Harry was in trouble. The Grindylows had him by the legs and were pulling him back. Esdras drew his wand and began casting spells, the Reductors striking the Grindylows and blowing them apart. Soon, Harry was free and swimming again. He looked up to see his savior and was confronted with a figure of fire and boiling water. Esdras nodded and pointed up. Harry shook his head and put his hands about his throat, where the last of the gill slits were starting to close up.

The Dementor sunk lower into the water and grabbed the chains that were still around Ron and Gabrielle's legs. Harry caught on and grabbed hold of Ron's wrist as the Dementor engaged his afterburners and rocketed his way to the surface. Esdras was almost to the surface when he again saw ice crystals in the water. A strange calm passed over him and he closed his eyes before the Firestorm cloak finally cut out, jerking Esdras to a sudden halt. He felt unnaturally cold.

"Esdras...are you alright?"

Esdras opened his eyes. Shining high above him, he saw the sun. He looked down and laughed lightly. From the waist down, his lower body was encased in a pillar of solid ice supported on a small iceberg formed by his escape spray. Harry clung tightly to the icy edge with Ron and Gabrielle, staring up at the stricken Dementor. Esdras nodded, the cold was seeping up into his chest. It was getting hard to keep his head up. "I'm fine, Harry. I'm just a little cold."

Esdras Demnin, cloaked in ice, closed his eyes and passed out.

Chapter 16 – Second Hogsmeade

Madame Pomfrey once again stood at the end of the hospital bed occupied by the Dementor. This time, however, she was not alone. Beside her floated Doctor Michaelis Transom and Captain Kira Kirin. Esdras looked up at them with black, empty, but hopeful eye sockets. She sighed and ticked off the list on her fingers. “Well, to start with, you’ve got frostbite over the lower half of your body. And when the ice formed around you, it instantly halted your upward momentum, causing complete spinal dislocation, plus major thoracic injuries. Your supersolenoid sustained minor damage only because your stomach held it in place. All told, it’s nothing severe enough for you to enter a healing bond over. Scans show you should have that healed up by the end of the day, and the rest of the damage can be dealt with overnight so long as we keep you well fed.”

Esdras leaned back and laughed. “I thought it was going to be serious.”

The nurse shook her head. “I’ll never get used to Dementor medicine, but having Doctor Transom here has been wonderful.”

The doctor nodded, speaking in thickly accented English. “I must admit, everything I’ve learned about mortal healing has been quite interesting, as well.” His voice quickly turned serious. “Now, young prince, as your chief medical officer, I am ordering you to bed rest at least until the supersolenoid damage has been repaired.”

The admiral sighed, but relented. “Yes, doctor.” He turned his attention to the research division captain and nodded softly. “Kira, I owe you an apology for how I acted today. Naturally, as captain of the research division, I should listen to your recommendations more carefully. Also, your work with the Quicksilver projects has been exemplary and will be noted on your service record.”

The captain bowed and spoke kindly. “Thank you, Lord Admiral. But no apology is needed where no offense is taken. You were concentrating on more important things at the time.”

Esdras shrugged as he shifted in his bed. “The troops under my command are important to me as well, captain.” He looked around at

the rows of empty beds and cast hopeful eye sockets towards his friends. "Did everyone else make it out without injuries? And who ended up winning?"

A gentle voice met the Dementor, and he leaned his head to see around the doctor and nurse. "Everyone's perfectly safe, thanks to you. The chains were long enough so that they didn't get caught in the ice." Katie walked past the standing nurse and floating Dementors and took a seat in the chair next to the hospital bed. "As for who won, that's obvious. A Dementor willing to risk the open water not once, but twice, in order to save loved ones, friends, and a perfect stranger? You won hands down. You were absolutely amazing, my darling."

Esdras shook his head slowly. "It was nothing out of the ordinary. Protect you, protect my friends, and protect the innocent. I was just doing what I had to do."

Katie laughed brightly and took his hand. "Well, the rest of the school doesn't see it that way. You and Harry and Ron are all being branded as heroes. Fleur even kissed Ron, turned the boy beet red."

The Dementor groaned. "I suppose I should prepare myself for the Veela onslaught, then. She'll want to thank me and probably her sister, too."

The mortal leaned in dangerously close. "Who said anything about a Veela onslaught? They weren't the only ones you saved today."

They were interrupted by a polite cough. Madame Pomfrey and Doctor Transom still stood over the pair looking rather amused. The mortal nurse put on her best stern look. "We'll leave you two alone for a while, then. But Katie, you'll be responsible for making sure he doesn't overexert himself."

Katie nodded happily and turned to her ward. She hefted up a heavy laden book bag onto the bed beside him. "Now, Esdras, since you're restricted to bed, I thought we could take some extra time to study for our OWLs."

Esdras narrowed his eyes. "You're not my Katie. You're Hermione and you've been hitting the Polyjuice again."

It took all night and three massive meals of Patronus before the medical triage spell came back a uniform green. And when Esdras was finally discharged and entered the Great Hall for breakfast the next day, the whole of the school rose to applaud him. He barely had time to brace himself before two slender platinum blonde forms launched themselves into his arms. The taller one had fresh tears of joy in her eyes and kissed his cheeks twice. "Amiral Demnin, I do not know zee words to thank you enough."

The smaller form of Gabrielle simply held on tight to the Dementor's waist and hugged. Esdras sighed and put an arm around both, hugging them tight. "I did what had to be done, nothing more. There is no need to thank me."

He slowly managed to disengage himself from the iron Veela grip and gave them both a pat on the shoulder before floating quickly off to the Gryffindor table. He glided quickly to sit beside Katie and sighed. "That went better than I expected."

From across the table, Harry laughed. "You probably got off easy because they're still a little uneasy about you being a Dementor. I know it wasn't as easy for me."

Ron sat next to Harry, grinning like a madman. "I don't see what your problem is; I didn't even try to break free."

Esdras shook his head. "But I didn't do anything special. I just did what I had to do."

Hermione stopped scolding Ron over his table manners and looked to the Dementor. "You don't get it, Esdras. You put yourself in danger to save not just one, but four lives, and you faced the ultimate weakness of your species twice without flinching. If you ever wanted to change popular opinion about your kind, you're succeeding. Look at this." The mortal handed over her copy of the Daily Prophet and Esdras opened it up to read the headline, "Demnin Saves the Day." The most amazing part of the article was the author, and Hermione

pointed this out. "Not even Rita Skeeter could find fault with your actions."

Katie frowned slightly and turned to Hermione. "No, she probably could. But she knows that she has to accurately report anything about Esdras or she'll face charges of libel on Azkaban and a resultant death sentence."

The Dementor smirked at the bushy haired girl's shocked expression and put an arm around Katie as she rested her head on his shoulder. "Well, regardless, that's two challenges down and one to go. And there's a Hogsmeade visit tomorrow. Life can't get much better than this."

Katie looked up. "So you're not worried about the third challenge?"

Esdras laughed. "For this last challenge, I became the first Dementor in all recorded history to touch water without freezing. And not just touch it, but go five hundred feet below the surface, wander around for about an hour, come out, and then go back in again. My kind has nightmares about that kind of thing. The next challenge is going to be nothing."

The mortals around the table looked at each other and shrugged. Harry laughed. "Well, that's one way to look at it."

When Katie met Esdras the next morning, he was holding an inordinately large satchel. The question of course, was obvious. "What's in the bag, Esdras?"

The Dementor answered honestly as he turned to put them into line to be checked off by Filch. "Food."

Katie looked at the bag again before staring curiously at her boyfriend. "Why?"

Esdras advanced with the line, inching closer to the door. "You'll see."

The subject was dropped for a while until they were out on the road heading towards Hogsmeade. There, Esdras picked up Katie and

flew the two of them and the satchel up and over the town of Hogsmeade. Katie held on tight and kept her questions to herself until they had landed on the other side of town, near the woods. "Where are we going?"

Esdras smiled, but changed the subject. "How did your career advising with McGonagall go?"

Katie laughed suddenly. "Well, she agreed with me that I did have a future as a professional Quidditch player, but thought that I should consider taking classes so that I could have something to fall back on if something happens."

The Dementor nodded. "Smart idea. What are you thinking about, then?"

The mortal blushed. "You'll laugh." At Esdras' encouragement, she finally sighed. "I want to work in the Ministry Dementor Liaison Office. I figure I have more than enough experience dealing with Dementors and the fact that I'm fluent in Azkabaaner would make me an exceptional employee."

Esdras smiled. "That's a wonderful idea. I know for a fact the people they have working in Dementor Liaison are total idiots. Having someone there who actually knows what's going on would be a major help."

Katie grinned. "But I'd still prefer to play Quidditch." She tapped him on the shoulder where his silver rank insignia glittered in the sun. "You've got it easy. You've already got your career." She leaned against Esdras and smiled. "Now, where are we going?"

The Dementor smirked. "We're going to visit a friend."

The mortal looked confused as they proceeded up the hillside to where the rocks began to protrude. It was there, as they were wandering aimlessly around, that she spied a large, black dog. It was only a few seconds before Esdras saw it, too. He smiled and glided forward to follow the dog. Katie trudged along behind him, annoyance laced in her voice. "I have no idea what you're doing, Esdras, and this isn't how I wanted to spend this trip."

The dog and Dementor disappeared in between two rocks into a small cave. When Katie followed, she startled. Her attention was torn between the hippogriff in the room and the fact that the dog had been replaced by a very rough looking human. Esdras inclined his head. "Katie Bell, this is prisoner chi psi 370, Sirius Black. Sirius, this is Katie."

While rough and dirty, Sirius still had a roguish gleam in his eye. He smirked when Katie didn't run screaming and extended a hand. "Well, either someone's told you the truth or you don't spook easily. Which would make sense considering the company you keep."

Katie laughed and took his hand, shaking it firmly. "I think it's a bit of both. And the fact that if you did happen to try anything, Esdras wouldn't even bother to eat your soul before he ripped your still beating heart from your chest."

Sirius paled at this for a moment, but quickly regained his composure. He turned to face his Dementor benefactor and took the satchel from him. He opened it up and the very first item on top was a large ham. The mortal eyed it as if it were made of gold. "Esdras, please make sure you thank everyone else for me. If it wasn't for your men keeping me supplied while I was here, I'd probably be stuck eating rats."

Esdras nodded and smiled. "It's the least we can do. Now be sure to let us know if you need anything else. I'll have Aaron or Malachi swing by next time the Thirteenth is on patrol out here." He looked around and sighed. "I wish we could do more about your surroundings, though."

The mortal scoffed. "No offense, but this is a right sight better than Azkaban. You'll notice the lack of iron bars anywhere." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a pocket watch with a broken face. "I need to get going; I'm supposed to meet Harry down by the turnstile in a few minutes."

The Dementor nodded. "We'll walk you down."

The ex-convict nodded and quickly took his Padfoot form, leading the two students from the cave. They walked back down the hill and onto the road. It was a short walk to the turnstile and there, waiting for

them, were Harry, Ron, and Hermione. All three looked curiously at the pair before Harry finally spoke. "You knew he was here?"

Esdras looked insulted. "I'm not an admiral for nothing, you know."

Leaving the trio to walk back to the cave with Sirius, Esdras and Katie began the hike back into town. The outer reaches of Hogsmeade seemed to beckon to them, for in this area of town the small cottages were spaced far apart and all had neat little gardens and low stone fences. The Dementor peered at a particularly fine looking dwelling and stopped to look at it. "This is what I'd want to have if I were mortal. A nice little house in a nice little town, and I would go to work each day and come home and plant a garden."

Katie took his hand and stared at the property as well. "And you can't have that now?"

Esdras shook his head. "A nice warm cave isn't the same as a nice little house. A massive underground city isn't the same as a nice little town. And serving in a military organization certainly doesn't allow me time to grow a garden."

The mortal leaned her head against his cloaked shoulder. "What would you plant?"

The Dementor thought carefully. "I would plant a vegetable garden...and a mint patch."

Katie laughed. "Of course, we must have a mint patch."

A single eyebrow raised up in curiosity as he looked down at her. "We?"

The mortal let out a soft squeak at her mistake and promptly flushed a bright red. She turned to face the Dementor and tried to figure out her words. "Well, what I meant to say was...I mean...I was just thinking that...well..."

Esdras stared impassively at her for a moment before turning towards town. He looked over his shoulder with a soft smile on his face. "That sounds ideal."

The pair quietly walked hand in hand into town.

Chapter 17 – OWLs in a Maze

A few days after Easter, Esdras found himself floating along in procession with the other champions. He called up the line. “Hey Cedric, do you know what this is all about?”

The Hufflepuff turned and fell back a few steps to walk alongside the Dementor. “I’m pretty sure it’s something to do with the third challenge. It would make sense, we’re due to get some sort of clue as to what to expect.”

They marched along, following Dumbledore, Maxime, Karkaroff, and Ludo Bagman to the Quidditch pitch. But when they stepped inside, the three Hogwarts Quidditch players were dumbstruck by the sight before them. Filling their beloved pitch was a low hedge. Cedric dropped to his knees in horror and Esdras gestured out to the field. “Oh my gods, they killed the Quidditch pitch!”

Cedric looked out at the carnage and shook with barely contained rage. “You bast...”

“Mister Demnin, Mister Diggory, if you are both quite finished we can explain the final challenge to you.” Albus Dumbledore glared at the two students sternly.

Cedric rose to his feet and took his place beside Harry. “Of course, headmaster.”

Dumbledore gestured out over the pitch. “It may not look like much now, but the final challenge will be a combination maze and obstacle course. In the center of the maze will be the Triwizard Cup, protected by obstacles which you will have to navigate in order to reach it. You will be released into the maze according to your current points standings, and the first person to reach the cup wins.”

Esdras rolled his glowing green eyes, his voice laced with sarcasm. “Perfect, should be a regular float in the park.”

Viktor looked over at the Dementor and then turned to the professors. “That is a good point. What is to keep Esdras from simply floating over the maze?”

The Dementor glared at the Bulgarian. "Aside from my honor?"

Dumbledore held up a hand to silence the two. "The sides of the maze will be twelve feet tall to prevent anyone from seeing over the top and it will be charmed with a glass ceiling charm. None of the five of you will be able to climb over the top of the maze. In addition, Dementors from the Fourth Fleet will be patrolling the air above the maze and professors will be waiting at the edges in the event of an emergency."

The five looked out over the hedge covered pitch for a few minutes longer. Finally, Esdras sighed and turned away. "I'd settle for a Quidditch Cup right about now, forget this Triwizard thing."

Esdras had barely gotten back to the common room and settled beside the fireplace when the door opened and a very frantic Professor Flitwick came running in. When he made a beeline for the Dementor, he just sighed. "Cloaks of the ancients, do you want me to pass my OWLs or not?"

Flitwick smiled wryly but kept his nervous pace. "Dumbledore has requested your presence. Harry said that he saw Barty Crouch coming out of the forest disoriented. Harry left to get help, but when he returned Crouch had disappeared."

The Dementor huffed and sat down his potions text before floating up. "I'm on my way. Floo the command bunker and have the duty officer send a squadron to meet me." He looked at his watch. "Stephanie should still be on duty, but the other secretaries have gotten better at English, so you should be alright."

He didn't even wait for Flitwick's reply as he floated out one of the common room windows and glided from the tower around the castle to where the only group of mortals near the forest was. When he settled down, Dumbledore immediately approached with Harry. "I'm sorry to pull you from your studies, Esdras, but I believe this is important. It seems that Barty Crouch has gone missing. When Mr. Potter here last saw him, he said some very unusual things."

Harry nodded. "It was strange. He was very confused, and he was talking to just about everything, even the trees."

The Dementor sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "The great and mighty Azkaban Guard, reduced to looking for bigoted Ministry personnel who have their neckties on so tight their brains don't get any air."

Harry shook his head. "He mentioned something about Bertha Jorkins, how it was his fault. And he said that the Dark Lord was getting stronger."

Esdras snapped his head to face Harry, his green eyes glowing in the night. "Now what is that supposed to mean? No one in the Ministry had heard from Jorkins since July. And there's only been a minor increase in Dark Wizard activity in the last few months, but nothing big enough to draw Ministry or Guard Command concern..."

By this time, Captain Micah Redoubt had floated in with five members of the 91st Infantry. They approached and sharply saluted. He spoke English for the benefit of the mortals. "You sent for us, Lord Admiral?"

Returning the salute, the admiral nodded. "Yeah, Micah, listen to Harry here and tell me what you think of this."

The Dementors listened to Harry's story again, and the captain let out a low whistle. "If the two were related, that would explain why the Ministry hasn't been able to find her yet."

Esdras nodded and put his hands on his hips, scanning the scene before him before turning to face his captain. "Micah, gather the rest of your division and sweep the forest. Look for any trace of mortal activity in there. Ask around if you have to, the Centaurs would probably be a good place to start. Report back to me when you're finished."

The captain snapped to attention. "Yes, Lord Admiral."

The admiral turned to Dumbledore and took a step closer before speaking in a quiet Azkabaaner whisper. "*I know the Ministry forbade this, but I want to send Veras and the 8th Infantry out to Albania for a*

reconnaissance mission. Just to see if they can come up with anything at all."

Dumbledore nodded quickly. *"I believe I would be interested to find out what they are able to uncover, myself."*

Esdras looked deep in thought for a while. *"The 91st is searching the forest; the 8th will be going to Albania. That leaves me with the 13th, but the 212th and 1102nd are Guard certified in the event that we need them. We'll still be secure here."* Satisfied, he nodded to himself and turned to face the headmaster. *"From you, I'll need to find Jorkins' travel itinerary so my men will know where to search."*

The headmaster smiled confidently. *"I'll make sure Captain Maul has it by tomorrow morning."*

The admiral quickly reassessed his surroundings and shrugged. "Not much more I can do here, then." His voice became wry. "I'll just go study potions."

The fast approaching terror of the OWLs found all the fifth years in Hogwarts frantically rushing around, trying to find tidbits of information that would help them when the testing day came. Esdras had resigned himself to the role of History of Magic tutor for most of his friends. Currently, he was holding court in the library.

Katie closed her eyes in concentration as she thought. "The International Code of Wizarding Secrecy was amended when you were sixty nine years old, so that was 1750, right?"

The Dementor nodded happily. "And what was the purpose of the amendment?"

The mortal groaned and dropped her head onto the table. "Bollocks, Esdras, I'm can't even remember what I had for breakfast this morning, let alone the purpose of amendments to some dusty, centuries old document."

Esdras sighed. "It made each nation's Ministry of Magic responsible for concealing the magical creatures within its boundaries. And you had oatmeal and toast with marmalade for breakfast."

Brown eyes looked up and narrowed from across the table. "Don't you get smart with me, Mister 'I'm Three Hundred Fourteen, I Saw Most of These Things Happen.' Not all of us are as lucky as you." Katie huffed slightly and looked at the books spread round about her. "Forget this."

The Dementor followed her with a curious expression as she got up and walked around the table, straddling his chair and sitting atop his lap. Esdras leaned back as far as he could, his voice was playful. "You were the one who wanted to study, Katie."

The mortal smiled and kissed him on the nose. "And now I'm the one who doesn't want to study." She leaned in and kissed him on the neck, eliciting a low moan from her beloved. "There are much better things we could be doing today than studying."

Esdras gasped as Katie switched from kisses to bites and slowly pushed the mortal away. "Darling, I've talked this over with you before. We still need to wait a while longer. The Oracle is preparing everything that we need. I promise that everything will be in place before we get on the train at the end of the year."

Katie sighed and snuggled in closer. "But I don't want to wait. I want you right now."

He put his head atop hers and leaned back in his chair. "Patience, my dear."

She bolted beneath him, bringing her brown eyes level with his glowing green eyes. "You never did tell me what the Oracle was preparing. It must be important if it takes nearly half a year to prepare."

Esdras nodded. "It's very old magic. Some even think it was passed down directly from the Azkaban gods. But, regardless, the knowledge has been held by my kind since before your kind started putting up those crazy pyramids."

Katie laughed and settled in closer against him. "What does this ancient magic of yours do, then?"

The Dementor never got a chance to reply, because they were interrupted by a horrified shriek from farther down the aisle. They both turned and grew wide eyed as Madame Pince neared them, wand drawn. "How dare the two of you defile the literature and sanctity of this library with your acts of wanton lust! Get out, both of you get out!"

Esdras startled and lifted them both in the air, his green eyes wide. "Cloaks of the ancients!"

Katie was more practical, pulling out her wand and casting a spell to make all their books and papers follow them. "Get us out of here, Esdras!"

The Dementor took flight, propelling them at top speed towards the nearest window, Pince still on their heels. Esdras looked up to see the only obstruction keeping them from freedom. "Katie, get the window!"

The mortal leveled her wand. "Alohamora!"

The lock obediently came undone and the window flew open just before the two of them passed through it and out into the open air, followed by a trail of paper and books. As Esdras began to slowly descend toward the ground, he looked back up to see Madame Pince glaring at them and shaking her fist. He let out the breath he didn't know he had been holding. "So, are you still in the mood?"

Katie shook her head quickly, her face ashen. "No, I'm all better now..."

Ever since the inception of the OWL exam and its big brother, the NEWT, the students of Hogwarts would be treated to a yearly reminder of the frailty of relationships in an academic setting. Katie and Esdras were no different. With a mere week left until the start of testing, the normally happy couple was in the middle of a heated argument in front of the Gryffindor portrait hole.

“We wouldn’t be having this argument if you had paid attention in History of Magic instead of dozing off and relying on me to remember things that happened over two centuries ago.” Esdras was losing his cool and it showed on his face, where his control over his animagus form was slowly deteriorating. Currently, his mortal face was accompanied by his hollow Dementor eye sockets.

Katie looked no better, her normally smooth dark blonde hair was a mess and her brown eyes had a furious shine to them. “You have no room to talk! You couldn’t find the open end of a cauldron if you floated into it!”

Esdras growled low, abandoning his mortal form. The hood of his cloak was narrowed in anger. The Azkaban accent in his voice was thick. “Oh, that’s fair, this coming from a person who managed to detonate a teacup in Transfiguration.”

The mortal threw her books down and ran a hand through her hair. “Damned it, Esdras, you said you’d never bring that up. What about that time you managed to burn your animagus form off when you tried to make that sleeping drought?”

The Dementor crossed his arms and glared down at her from a high hover. “It only took my face off and you know it.”

The Fat Lady, watching the normally perfect couple rapidly self destruct, tried to calm them down. “Esdras, Katie, why don’t you two take a break from studying for a few hours. It’s a lovely day out, you could go for a walk, or get something from the kitch...”

Twinned voices cut her off sharply. “Shut up!”

The two were again interrupted when the portrait hole swung open, to reveal Harry, Hermione, and Ron, the three of whom quickly shut up when they saw the pair with murder in their eyes. Hermione recovered first. “Alright there, Esdras? Katie?”

The Dementor slowly lowered himself down to ground level. “Oh, we’re just fine. But I think I am going to go for a float. I want to shuffle off this mortal coil for a while.”

The three younger Gryffindors and the Fat Lady watched Esdras float off before turning to face Katie. Her eyes still flashed in a manner that made both Harry and Ron keep behind Hermione. The bushy haired girl put on her best smile. "Katie, would you like to..."

Katie cut her off by turning her back and walking away. "Sod off, Hermione."

The entire school learned about the fight very quickly, since the obvious change in the high profile couple was so striking. The Gryffindor and Ravenclaw rumor mills were working overtime trying to determine where the pair now stood, with the majority of both houses thinking that it was just a temporary spat and would work itself out after testing. It still disturbed everyone to see how icily civil the normally affectionate two were. They would still talk and study together, neither was stupid enough to think that they didn't need the help of the other, but gone was the playful dynamic that made them what they were.

By the morning of the Defense Against the Dark Arts written exam, most of the ice had melted, and Katie was waiting in the Entrance Hall with the other fifth years. Behind her stood the cloaked form of Esdras. She couldn't see him, but then again, she didn't have to. She knew he was there. "Are you nervous?"

The voice from behind her was calm. "No, and you shouldn't be, either. You're good at Defense; we never had a problem studying this." She felt light touch on the small of her back, Esdras reaching out to touch her. "We will get through this."

Katie nodded, and reached back to take his hand. She held it tightly for a second before stepping backwards and tentatively leaning against him. He didn't flinch or push her away. She smiled softly. "We'll get through this just like we get through everything else?"

Esdras smirked and nodded. "Well, this will probably be easier than a fight, if that's what you mean."

The mortal laughed quietly and leaned her head back on his shoulder. "I'm sorry, my love."

The Dementor shrugged. "No apology needed. It's just exam stress. Before Aaron and I went up for the Guard Academy exams, we had a fight that almost came to blows. After the exam, we went out for drinks and it was like nothing happened." He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her closer. "I'm just glad you didn't try to hit me is all."

Katie laughed as the doors to the Great Hall opened. She pulled slowly away from the Dementor's embrace and sighed. "I guess this is it. Good luck, Esdras."

Esdras nodded and leaned in, giving her a lingering kiss before they joined the crowd entering the hall. He took her hand and squeezed it. "We'll make our own luck, Katie."

A short while later, McGonagall called the start of the exam. Katie opened her exam scroll and ran her eyes over the first question. She had to laugh, but stifled it quickly at McGonagall's smirking glare; obviously she had read the exam before giving it out. Katie inked her quill and sighed, rereading the question. "Describe the physical appearance of a Dementor and the proper course of action if approached."

Chapter 18 – The Third Challenge

The maze had long since been prepared, and the five champions were ready for the evening to come. But currently, with hours to go before the event, they were granted the chance to visit with their families. Unlike the other three, both Harry and Esdras were surrounded by surrogate families. Harry was being well tended to by the Weasleys, and Esdras equally well tended to by the Bells.

Mrs. Bell smiled as she hugged the Dementor tightly. “Esdras, you’re looking well, my dear. We were surprised when we received an owl from Dumbledore. He had said you may need moral support, so we just had to come.”

Esdras blushed a dark grey and returned the embrace. “As happy as I am to see you all, I do have moral support. Aaron and Christine will be here for me, and the Transoms and the Mauls and the Redoubts and the Kirins. But, I could use mortal support.”

Katie groaned at the poor joke, but her mother was not to be dissuaded. “It’s good to have friends, dear, but it’s not the same as family.” She looked around for more Dementors. “Where is your family?”

The Dementor coughed slightly and Katie paled at her mother’s question. “Mom, Esdras is the rightful king of Azkaban. That would mean that his parents are...well, you know.”

Esdras nodded and smiled sadly. “Katie’s right, they died about seventy years ago. They were in their late eight hundreds, so the decided to go ahead and make the change.”

Katie looked curiously at the Dementor. “The change?”

He nodded. “What I’m about to tell you is another great Dementor secret.” He paused to collect his thoughts and even then spoke slowly. “One of the provisions of Dementor immortality commanded by the goddess of the hearth and home is that a family unit must remain whole for the sake of the children. This means that whatever form the children take, the parents will take also.”

Mrs. Bell look confused. "What do you mean the form they take?"

Esdras sighed, looking positively embarrassed to have to discuss this. "If a Dementor breeds with a mortal, the child will be born a Dementor. In order to preserve the family, the mortal parent will be changed as well and will live as a full Dementor. However, if a Dementor in animagus form breeds with a mortal or another Dementor in animagus form, the child will be born in a similar mortal form and the Dementor or Dementors will take that form and live a mortal lifespan. This is the most common way for Dementors to end their lives, most believe it's an interesting change of pace."

Katie looked shocked. "So your parents became mortal?"

The Dementor nodded and laughed. "They both took a fox animagus form; I got to spend a few more years after that before they passed on. So you might find it interesting to know that somewhere in Wales there is a skulk of foxes that I am related to."

Mrs. Bell wrapped her arms around him again and hugged him tightly. "I'm sorry, Esdras. I didn't know."

He leaned into the embrace and returned it. "It's alright; it's been many years now. I miss them, but death is a part of life. Especially in my family, being descended from the god of death helps you understand it just a little bit more."

The three turned to walk towards the castle, where Mr. Bell and Eric were waiting. Katie took Esdras' hand and held it tightly. "Are you nervous?"

Esdras shook his head and smiled confidently. "Not in the least. I can't imagine there being anything in that maze that I can't handle. Not even Mad Eye Moody himself could throw me a loop."

The sun was nearing the horizon by the time the crowd had gathered at the Quidditch pitch to cheer on the five champions as they took their places to enter the maze. Esdras hovered calmly with his fellow Dementors, where they were discussing last minute details.

Aaron was looking at a constantly changing map of the maze and calling orders into the communication charm of his assault cloak. *"Malachi, bring the Thirteenth Infantry over to the southern edge of the maze and distribute them as you see fit. That should cover most of the maze. We still have a few blind spots, but it's as good as we're going to get it. I had no idea they made this thing so big."*

Dementor laughter came across the link. *"You should see it from up here. I don't want to be the person who has to pull this thing up when it's over."*

His duties finished, Aaron shook his head and glided over to where Esdras and Kira were discussing the assault cloak that he was wearing. Captain Kirin was giving Esdras the final rundown on his garment. *"Dr. Transom and I have modified this assault cloak with mark thirteen inhibition spells and the most advanced stasis spells available. There are two ways to activate it, either press and hold your rank insignia for five seconds or it will automatically engage if your ichor level drops below ten percent. In either case, it will automatically fire red sparks into the air and we'll know to come pick you up."* She nervously straightened the lines of the cloak. *"Simply remain safe, my Lord."*

Esdras nodded and placed a hand upon her shoulder. *"I do not intend to risk any more than I have to, Captain."*

With a final round of well wishing, Esdras floated over to where the other four champions were gathered. They turned to face the full stadium, and Esdras could see many nervous faces. He gave a quick smile and a wave to Katie, who did her best to look brave. Finally all turned to face Ludo Bagman as he gave the rules for the final challenge. *"Ladies and gentlemen, this is the final challenge of the Triwizard Tournament. The rules are simple, navigate the maze and all obstacles contained within to find the Triwizard Trophy in the center. The first person to touch it will be the winner. If you, at any time, cannot finish the event, fire red sparks from your wand and either a professor or a Dementor will remove you from the maze. Good luck."*

The champions lined up by points standing. Esdras was second behind Cedric. After the Hufflepuff took off into the maze, Esdras raised his hood and waited his turn, his wand drawn and held in a ready position. Moody nodded, and Esdras took off at a fast float into the maze. It was only a few feet into the thick greenery before he lost all sight and sound of the crowd in the pitch. He kept advancing through the maze, utilizing both sets of eyes to scan the surroundings as he made random turns here and there.

The first obstacle he came to really couldn't even be considered an obstacle by Azkaban standards. The anti-gravity mist that hovered across a twenty foot section of maze succeeded in flipping Esdras upside down, but he merely continued floating forward. As a neutrally buoyant creature, the Dementor laughed softly to himself as he finally righted himself.

When he turned the corner, though, he was brought to a dead halt. In shock he ran forward to the prone form before him. "Katie?" He turned her over and shook her. "Katie, wake up. Come on, honey, what are you doing in here?"

He checked for a pulse and found it, checked for breathing and found it, and then he checked for a soul. The body before him was as black as the surroundings to his Dementor vision. It was obvious; with these symptoms she had been Kissed. Esdras closed his eyes and rose slowly, drawing his wand and pointing it at the body. "You wouldn't be here if you were my Katie, she would be waiting for me. But you are my fear, and you use her form against me. Death be unto you. Riddikulus!"

The Boggart vanished in a puff of smoke.

Harry couldn't decide if he was lost or on the right track. The last living creature he had run into was the Sphinx, and that was about ten minutes ago. He sighed and turned another corner when he heard a high pitched, almost animalistic shriek. He jumped back as the hedgerow ahead of him exploded to reveal the Sphinx he had just seen laying unconscious on her side. Out of the hole in the hedgerow, the unnaturally tall form of Esdras floated through. "I told you my fist

was the right answer, but you wouldn't believe me." The Dementor turned and nodded. "Harry, how are you doing?"

The scarred mortal looked from the Dementor to the Sphinx and back again. When he finally replied, his voice was surprisingly calm. "I'm fine, Esdras. You?"

Esdras shrugged his shoulders. "Doing good, but I'm kind of in a rush. Stay safe."

With a quick wave, Esdras turned and floated in the opposite direction of Harry. Advancing down a yet untested path in the ever deepening maze. Five minutes and fifteen turns later, Esdras was sure he was lost. He sighed and looked around, wishing that he could just rise up for a second and get an aerial view. That was before a low, growling voice called out. "Demnin, get over here."

The Dementor turned and stared into the darkness, he could see a soul glowing, but had to rely on the voice. "Moody? Is that you?"

The form approached closer. "For the moment." The mortal raised his wand. "Reducto!"

The curse flew through the air and struck the unsuspecting Dementor in his wand arm. Esdras cried out in pain and brought his left arm up to cover the stump where his right arm had been. He tried desperately to staunch the blood flow until healing began. "Moody, what the hell?!"

The mortal laughed, a wild, wicked laugh that Mad Eye Moody wouldn't be caught dead making. "Even the great Lord Admiral Esdras Demnin was fooled! It was perfect!" Again the wand was brought to bear. "Reducto!"

Esdras screamed and collapsed, gasping for air. Lifting his head as best he could, he looked down to see both legs resting a few feet from his body. The stumps were bleeding both blood and ichor profusely. Catching his breath as best he could, Esdras looked to his attacker. "Who the hell are you?"

He watched with amazed mortal eyes as the form before him slowly began to change. The torn nose filled out, and the magical eye popped from its socket to reveal a true eye. The prosthetic leg fell off to reveal a complete limb. And as the face changed, the Dementor gasped. Barty Crouch, Jr., a convicted, sentenced, and supposedly dead Death Eater, grinned evilly at the fallen guard. "You recognize me, don't you?"

The Dementor shook his head. "No, you died on Azkaban and are buried in a shallow, unmarked grave on the Azkaban shore!"

The Death Eater grinned evilly. "Oh, you can thank my mother for that one. You'd be surprised what a parent will do to save her child. It's her body in that shallow grave, and no one ever knew the difference."

Esdras gave a wet cough, ignoring the trail of blood and ichor dripping from the corner of his mouth. "I never understood why Admiral Sidara gave the order to allow you visitors. Monsters like you don't even deserve a family."

The mortal glared and brought his wand to bear. "Reducto!"

Esdras screamed and threw his remaining arm over his abdomen, curling into a ball as the pain overtook him. When he pulled his arm back, his hand was covered with ichor. He looked down to reveal the awful truth, in the center of his abdomen was a massive hole. In the center of this hole lay his supersolenoid; the glowing organ was crisscrossed with a spider web of fractures all glowing a brilliant silver.

Crouch laughed demonically. "It's amazing the things you can learn with a proper Defense library. Dementors can be killed if you know exactly where to strike. The Dark Lord will be pleased. With you gone, Azkaban will have no leader, the Dementors will gladly follow him."

Esdras gasped for breath, biding his time. His wounds were no longer bleeding; not surprising considering the size of the puddle he was sitting in, and his ichor was quickly draining away. Putting his faith and life in the hands of his captains, he turned his mortal face to glare at the prisoner, addressing him by number. "Azkaban will never follow the likes of him. You will not win, theta rho 141, not today and not ever." Around his body, his cloak began to turn a dark grey. Crouch

looked on in amazement as the mortal eyes changed from glowing green to glowing grey. Esdras smiled. "You see, Dementors play to win, or at least break even."

With only ten percent of his ichor reserves remaining, the stasis cloak activated. It slowly wrapped itself around his body and secured itself tightly from the bottom up. Red sparks began to fly from the shoulders, filling the air with the alert signal. Crouch growled and leveled his wand one last time. The hood was still open and Esdras smirked triumphantly right until Crouch called his final spell. "Reducto!"

The mortal stared at his handiwork before the bloody hood sealed up and smirked. This sort of damage would take the Dementor weeks to repair. He pulled his flask from his pocket and quickly drank the Polyjuice Potion contained within. As the change from one form to another began, he sat down to grab the prosthetic limb and eye. Mad Eye Moody would be the first to respond to Esdras Demnin's call for help.

Chapter 19 – The Healing Bond

Michaelis Transom had the majority of his Field Hospital division holding back the crowd. *“Get them back, I don’t care what it takes. We need room to work. I want duplicate triage spells on the Lord Admiral after we free him from stasis.”* He turned to face an assembly of nurses. *“I need bandages, blood, and all the ichor we have in reserves. Now!”*

The nurses scattered to do the doctor’s bidding as the members of the Thirteenth Infantry brought in the cloaked form of their admiral. Aaron spoke quickly. *“I don’t know what the hell happened to him, but he’s lost a lot of mass.”*

Transom’s voice was steely. *“We’ll find out soon enough.”* He tapped the stasis cloak with his wand. *“I am breaking the stasis spells now, begin casting the triage spells.”*

Even before the information returned from the spells, the obvious injuries were apparent as the cloak peeled away from Esdras. One of the young attending nurses brought her hands to her hood and quickly floated away. All did their best to concentrate on anything other than the sound of her retching. Aaron shook his head. *“What did this to him?”*

The body before them was shattered. As the last vestiges of his animagus spell fell away, the Dementor body before them was triply amputated, with both legs and the right arm missing. The fractures in the supersolenoid were growing, threatening the integrity of the vital organ. But the damage caused by the final blast was the most severe, Esdras Demnin had been decapitated.

A decidedly mortal voice called out from behind them. *“Damned you all, let me through. I said, let me through!”* Katie had managed to push through the outer defenses and was now rushing towards the prone form of Esdras. She called out as she ran. *“Esdras!”*

Aaron turned quickly and caught her, blocking her from the carnage. *“No Katie, you don’t want to see this. It’s bad, but he can get through it.”*

Katie struggled in the Dementor's grip. *"Let me go, Aaron. I want to see him. I have to see him, please!"*

The captain sighed and finally relented, keeping a tight grip on her as he turned to show her what was left of her boyfriend. Any coherent thought in Katie Bell left as she screamed and cried, turning to bury her face in the black cloaked form behind her. Aaron remained calm. *"Let the doctors do their work. He'll pull through this."*

The triage spell finished and Transom began calling out orders. *"Start with five units of ichor, put a line directly into the supersolenoid. Push twenty five milliliters of ichodrenaline into the line as well. Let's see if we can't stop those fractures from getting any worse. Put another line in his remaining arm and start refilling him, eight units of type K-negative blood."*

The attending nurses rushed to carry out his orders. One pushed a platinum needle into Esdras' good arm and began to squeeze a bag of black Dementor blood down the line. Another team working around his torso stabbed the damaged supersolenoid with a platinum needle; a second nurse hooked a crystal carboy of glowing silver liquid onto the line. A third nurse placed a syringe of glowing dark green liquid into a special port on the line and leaned down hard on the plunger, pushing the liquid down the line and into the damaged organ. As the first tinges of the green liquid hit, Esdras began to shake softly.

Aaron, still holding Katie, tried to talk her through the procedures. *"The ichor will keep the damage from spreading and the ichodrenaline is the Dementor analogue of mortal adrenaline. It will increase his heart rate and supersolenoid output to aid his healing."*

Dr. Transom quickly consulted the triage spell and looked around. *"The damage is still too severe. We have to seal up the supersolenoid with a Healing Bond. I don't even want to think about regrowing his head and limbs yet. Any volunteers for the Healing Bond?"*

Every Dementor voiced an affirmative reply, but Aaron took control of the situation. *"Stand down, everyone. DeCay, Trieste, Kirin, Redoubt, and I will do it."*

A soft voice came from behind the captain. *"Don't count me out."* Christine Reaping had floated down to hover beside her husband. *"Let's get this started."*

Dr. Transom nodded to the six Dementors. *"You know what to do. Prepare yourselves."* He turned to face the mortal crowd. Standing calmly at the front was Dumbledore. The doctor regarded the wizened wizard. "Headmaster, we'll need all the Patronus energy you and your people can provide, otherwise the bond will likely kill us in the process. This will not be easy and the Lord Admiral is more important than any number of us. We are prepared to give our lives for our superior, what are you prepared to give for your student?"

Dumbledore nodded and turned to gather his own force. "Minerva, Filius, Severus, Poppy, surround yourselves around the Dementors. When they begin the Healing Bond, cast your Patroni. They will take it from there."

The doctor watched as final preparations were made. The Dementors stood in a circle around Esdras and the mortals stood in a circle around the Dementors. When all was complete, he turned to face the only mortal in the inner circle. *"Katie, I need you to hold him while we do this."*

Katie nodded and dried her tears before stepping up and taking her first good look at the bleeding and broken form before her. Even in this state of horrible damage, she was happy to see that his chest still rose and fell with every breath he took. The nurses had been busy and now there were multiple needles placed at various points on the glowing supersolenoid organ, providing a constant flow of glowing silver liquid from their hovering crystal carboys. She reached out and took the damaged body into her arms; he was heavier than usual, a sign that his float bladders had long since shut down.

The low chanting in Azkabaaner was almost imperceptible but quickly gathered in strength and volume. *"Ancient Cerah, god of healing, god of medicine, god of wellness, share the bounty we possess with the broken. Our strength to his weakness, in this hour of need."*

The Dementors began to float, spinning slowly in a clockwise circle around Esdras. Thin tendrils of silver energy came from their

abdomens, braiding together in the empty space and touching Esdras at his damaged supersolenoid. The moment that tendrils had connected from all seven Dementors, shouts from the professors began. "Expecto Patronum!"

The Patroni flew forth from their wands. The spectral animals brought forth by Dumbledore, McGonagall, Flitwick, Snape, and Pomfrey rose into the empty space between mortal and Dementor. Slowly the animal forms began to fade and coalesce together as the pure energy spun in a counterclockwise direction. The Dementors immediately processed the energy, sending out ichor as fast as they could produce it.

In the center of the circle, Katie watched in awe as the chanting and spinning continued around her. The ichor was flooding Esdras' body and she could actually see the cracks in his supersolenoid repairing themselves. It was a matter of minutes before the organ glowed uniformly. From the spinning Dementor circle, Transom's voice called out to everyone. *"The supersolenoid is healed, we can break the bond now or try to put his head back on. Opinions?"*

Dumbledore called out from the outer circle. *"Keep going. The maze had nothing that could have caused a Dementor this much injury. I want to know what happened to him as soon as possible."*

So, by mutual agreement, the power output continued. Katie watched in awe as Esdras' head was restructured layer by layer inside a soft silver glow. First the skull formed, which was covered over by muscle and sinew, then finally the soft tissue and the skin. As the reconstructed head fell limp, the Dementors began to slow down and the Patroni disappeared. Dr. Transom floated over to Katie and cast the triage spell again. As the results came in, he nodded happily. *"This is excellent. Everything went perfectly. It would have taken him two to three weeks to regrow his head without our help."*

Katie looked on nervously as a pair of nurses took the still unconscious body from her arms. *"But why isn't he awake yet? Will he even remember anything when he does?"* She panicked. *"Will he remember me?"*

Dr. Transom put a calming hand on her shoulder. *"He won't be awake for a while yet. The supersolenoid carries a duplicate copy of his memories. It will begin rewriting his brain at the rate of about a year a minute. He'll wake up when that's complete. He's 314 years old so that should take a little over five hours."*

The mortal sighed. *"That's not too bad. I'll go with him to the Hospital Wing."*

They were interrupted by screams and shouting from the other side of the arena. The crowd of mortals and Dementors parted to reveal Harry, Cedric, and the Triwizard Cup. The scarred wizard was bloody and in shock. Cedric wasn't moving. The look in Harry's eyes said it all. "Cedric is dead."

In the hallway outside of the Hospital Wing, Captains Reaping, Redoubt, and Kirin stood with Commander DeCay and Lieutenant Trieste. They looked through the door to where Christine was comforting Katie as she kept watch over Esdras' prone form. On the other side of the wing, Harry lay staring at the ceiling. Aaron sighed and ran a hand over his hood. *"Options?"*

Malachi thought for a moment before answering. *"I think in this situation, Esdras would want us to take immediate action. That means you're in command, captain."*

Aaron nodded, already feeling the terrible burden pressing upon his shoulders. *"We'll have to report this to Azkaban. I want direct orders regarding exactly what to do about theta rho 141. I want you and Stephanie to take care of that. Make sure you report what Harry said. Tell them the Dark Lord has risen and that we need orders as to how to proceed with this information."*

Malachi and Stephanie saluted smartly and floated into the Hospital Wing to use the fireplace in Madame Pomfrey's office. Everyone politely ignored that, in this time of stress, the two were holding hands. Kira turned to the temporary commander of the Fourth Fleet. *"What do you think Guard Command's response will be?"*

Shaking his head, Aaron returned his attention to the Hospital Wing. *"I don't know. If what Harry said is true, this could shake the very foundation of the mortal and Dementor worlds."* He narrowed his hood and turned to Kira. *"I'm prepared to trust the mortal child as Esdras does. Captain Kirin, begin the final consolidation of the Quicksilver Projects and be quiet about it. Esdras made it no secret he wanted them under your command. This is reason enough to see that it happen. You are authorized to forge any document, any signature you may need."*

Kira nodded, her voice respectful. *"The Lord Admiral chose wisely in an executive. I will proceed immediately to Azkaban and have the last of the projects under our control by sunrise."*

Aaron nodded and turned to face Micah. *"Captain Redoubt, set up a perimeter and keep watch. Station two of your most trusted men to guard theta rho 141 and make sure they're well fed. I don't want anything keeping us from bringing him in alive. Beyond that, I don't think there's anything else left that we can do."* The captain of the 91st Infantry saluted sharply and floated off, leaving the commanding officer alone. *"All we can do is wait."*

He was still mulling his options when Malachi returned to him, worry written all over his hood. *"Aaron, the Guard Command said that the Ministry has requested that they send us a temporary commander until Esdras has his memory restored. And you're not going to like who they're sending."*

The Dementor arched his hood in surprise. *"Not her. They couldn't have sent her."*

Malachi nodded, his voice an angry whisper. *"Vice Admiral Lara Sidara."*

Esdras bolted upright, screaming. *"Stop him! Moody is Crouch! Someone has to stop him!"* He struggled as he felt hands on his arm, holding his only limb down. He turned to face the bright brown eyes of Katie and relaxed. *"Katie?"*

Katie nodded. "We know. Dumbledore has already taken care of him. He's in the tower cell right now." She pulled the covers back around his body and smoothed out his hair. "Everything is taken care of, my love."

The Dementor gasped and fell back into the bed, taking account of his bandaged abdomen and limb remnants. "I never suspected anything. You've seen what I see; souls look like the physical form in glowing silver. I would have never known. That sadistic bastard had me completely fooled, and I'm supposed to be an admiral of the Azkaban Guard."

Brown eyes narrowed as Katie turned Esdras' head to face her. "You stop that thinking right now. I won't have a repeat of last year with you going Guard on me again. With everything that's been going on this year, it's no surprise you didn't suspect a thing. He was so good, not even Dumbledore noticed."

Glowing green eyes narrowed. "But you can still understand how stupid this makes me feel." He huffed slightly and looked around; it was a somber sight that met him. Harry lay in bed, freshly woken by the screaming and tended to by Mrs. Weasley and the great black dog form of Sirius Black. Esdras turned to face Katie. "What is Harry doing in here? Did something in the maze get him? What is Sirius doing here? And who won the tournament, anyway?"

Katie paled and Esdras automatically knew to expect the worst. The young mortal took his hand and struggled to find the words. "Fleur had a bad run in with some Devil's Snare, she was disqualified. Viktor was put under an Imperius and attacked Cedric, but Cedric and Harry both made it to the Trophy. But...but..."

Years as a guard had given Esdras a cold and analytical eye when needed. If Harry was in bed in Hospital, then something bad had happened to Cedric. Esdras did not mince words. "How did Cedric die?"

The mortal girl burst into tears and collapsed onto his chest. From across the aisle, Esdras heard Harry speak quietly. "Voldemort. He ordered Peter Pettigrew to do it, then to cast a spell that gave him back his body. Voldemort is back, Esdras."

Esdras sighed and put his hand on top of Katie's head, softly stroking her hair as she cried. For a long while, he remained deep in thought. When he finally spoke, his voice was cold as ice. "There will be time to mourn when the sun has risen. I need to know what has been done during my absence. Did Aaron take command?"

Katie nodded into his chest; her voice was muffled and watery. "Within minutes of Crouch being unmasked."

"Where is he now?"

The mortal sighed and pulled away from the Dementor, wiping her eyes with her sleeve. "He left about three hours ago. The Ministry wanted Azkaban to send an admiral to serve as temporary commander since Crouch is being held here. He left to meet her when she arrived from Azkaban."

They were interrupted from further discussion by the doors to the Hospital Wing opening and a mass of Dementors and mortals passing through. A Dementress led the pack with a disgruntled Aaron at her side, followed by two mortals, Fudge and McGonagall. Behind them glided the other captains of the Fourth Fleet and Professor Snape. McGonagall was shouting up a storm. "I can't believe you authorized them to use the Kiss on Crouch! He should have been returned to Azkaban and held for trial!"

Aaron translated for the Dementress as she turned around and regarded the professor. "Admiral Sidara says that you would do well not to question the decisions of her command."

"Any decision made by your command should be questioned, Sidara." The entire crowd turned and gasped. There, hovering in the aisle between beds, was the triply amputated Esdras. He floated uncloaked in his Dementor form at eye level with his fellow Dementors, and stared into their hoods with empty black eye sockets. He approached the Dementress. *"You were the one who got us into this mess to begin with. You allowed the Crouch family to visit their son and gave him the opportunity to make an escape. And now you have the nerve to authorize the Kiss just to cover your own ass?"*

Admiral Sidara stared at the floating and broken Esdras before sputtering her reply. *"Mind yourself, rear admiral. I still outrank you. It's not your place to question my orders."*

Esdras laughed. *"Hiding behind authority is the last act of the desperate. Your name will be found on the authorization to allow Mr. and Mrs. Crouch access to theta rho 141 and blame will fall where blame is due."* He crossed his arm across his chest and rose up a few more feet to tower over her. *"Besides, royal house trumps vice admiral. Now, as you can plainly see, I am awake and my memory restored. I hereby reassume command of the Fourth Fleet. Get out of my command, Lara. Dismissed."*

The Dementress before him quivered in barely contained rage before narrowing her hood at him. *"I don't know what I ever saw in you."*

As she turned and floated quickly from the room, Esdras growled and called out in anger. *"You saw my money, but I saw your greed!"* Aaron rushed forward and managed to catch Esdras as he fell from the air. The broken Dementor gasped as exhaustion overtook him. *"I don't know...what I ever saw...in her."*

Chapter 20 – Rise of the Order

Aaron hurried Esdras back into his hospital bed and covered him with the bed sheets charmed with the mark thirteen inhibitor spells. He beckoned Dr. Transom to the bedside. The doctor cast a quick triage spell and nodded. *“He’s fine, he’s just overexerted himself. He’ll need to feed again, too. His ichor is down to forty percent and he’s in passive feeding so we’ll just keep him under the bed sheets for now.”*

Esdras pushed himself up slowly and looked to his friends. *“It’s okay, I feel fine. It was just a little too much all at once. I just had to get rid of her.”* He turned to face the Minister of Magic. “But you, you actually allowed her to go through with it? You have the final say in authorizing things like that. What were you thinking? We lost any chance we may have had to interrogate him about Voldemort’s plans.”

Fudge shivered at the mention of the name, but shook his head. “Crouch was just a sad, insane young man. There is no Dark Lord, he was killed years ago. Harry must have been seeing things or making up stories. I can’t say I blame him, whatever happened to Cedric was certainly traumatic.”

“But we will never know for sure now, will we?” The powerful voice of Dumbledore filled the Hospital Wing. He strode in, a look of fury in his eyes. “Can we really afford to not take precautions against his return? You know what Voldemort will do if he rises. He will start building an army, and he’ll start with his old followers and he will attempt to curry favor with the creatures that the ministry is not on the best of terms with.”

Esdras smirked at Dumbledore’s politeness, but now was not the time for it. “Headmaster Dumbledore means Dementors, Minister.” He laughed at the Minister’s shocked expression. “Oh no, not me. My men and I are the least of your concerns. But there is a movement within my people. They are Dementors who are so angry at the Ministry and the Treaty of Edinburgh that they would happily follow Voldemort anywhere. It was the same during the last war, but I was able to better control them then. Now, they’ve had time to organize themselves. They are a more powerful force than ever. You would be

well advised to allow Admiral Grim to restructure the duty rosters of Azkaban so that only Dementors loyal to the royal house are on duty.”

Dumbledore nodded. “Not just Dementors, but the giants have been marginalized as well. The Ministry has been out of contact with them for far too long. If Voldemort gets to them first, they would be a powerful force.”

Fudge set his jaw and shook his head. “There is no need to even talk about these sorts of things. You Know Who has not risen, and that is the official position of the Ministry.”

Snape huffed in the corner and rolled up his sleeve. “If that’s really the case, then how do you explain this, Minister?” His arm bore the burning scar of the Dark Mark. “It’s been burning all night. Only the Dark Lord can do that. That is the only explanation.”

Fudge still shook his head. “The official position of the Ministry is that You Know Who is dead and buried.”

The headmaster stared at the Minister for a long moment before turning and walking towards the Dementor. “Then this is where we part ways. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to tend to one of my students.”

Fudge watched in shock as Dumbledore ignored him and proceeded to cast his powerful phoenix Patronus over the broken Dementor. He turned to Harry and dropped a large bundle on the table beside his bed. “Here are your winnings from the tournament, one thousand Galleons. Congratulations.”

As the shining Patronus disappeared, Esdras again sat up to regard the headmaster of Hogwarts. The graying wizard appeared deep in thought. When he finally did speak, he spoke in Azkabaaner. “*There is a battle looming, Admiral Demnin. I gather from your words with the Minister that you realize exactly how great the stakes are.*”

Esdras nodded. *"Like my ancestors before me, I have an entire nation to look after. Voldemort will try to destroy your world and in the process will try to destroy mine as well. I cannot let that happen."*

Dumbledore extended his left hand. *"Join me then in the fight. I believe you already know what I am referring to."*

The Dementor nodded and shook left hands, the only hand he had available. *"I gladly ally myself with the Order of the Phoenix, as will all the Dementors under my command."*

The mortal smiled softly. *"I will gladly accept your alliance. You and your men will be a valuable asset."* He turned to face the other bed and the attendant people. "Molly, I need to know if you and Arthur are willing to join in the fight again."

The redhead nodded determinedly. "You know we will."

As Dumbledore continued around, gathering support and giving orders, Katie leaned in to whisper to Esdras. "What's going on?"

The Dementor remained silent for a moment, and then replied as carefully as he could. "We're going to fight back, those of us that have the strength to. Voldemort will be stopped."

A skeletal hand fell on Katie's shoulder, and she looked up to see the cloaked form of Aaron Reaping. "A similar band was formed by Dumbledore during the first war, and fought a shadow war against the Dark Lord. Back then, Dementors were still seen as unholy terrors, and more apt to join him than to fight against him, so we were not extended invitations. Now, times have changed."

Esdras nodded resolutely. "Contrary to popular belief, we would never ally ourselves with him. If he took power, there would be no happiness, no good emotions in the mortal world. Our food supply would slowly dry up and then we'd be in trouble. Those idiots who support him just don't seem to realize this."

The Dementors and mortal fell to silence as Dumbledore, Snape, and the canine Black left the room, leaving Molly Weasley and Harry

Potter. Harry looked across the room and smiled weakly at Esdras. "I don't suppose I can convince you to share the prize money with me?"

Esdras let out a strange, fearful hissing sound and floated up to hide behind Aaron, who hissed as well and backed away quickly. To Harry, they were simply making strange noises, but Katie translated quickly, backing away herself. "Esdras cannot accept it. The money has been tainted with blood. In Azkaban lore it is bad fortune to knowingly accept such money."

Harry nodded. "I understand. But I certainly don't deserve it. I have enough already that I neither need nor want it."

Esdras peered out from behind Aaron, who was peering out from behind Katie. "And you think I need it? Remember the platinum rose?"

The mortal sighed. "Okay, okay, I get it."

Esdras slowly returned to his bed, still eying Harry warily. He finally turned to Aaron, who was equally uncomfortable. "Double the patrols for the remainder of the night. I doubt we're in any danger, but it wouldn't be a bad idea." He sighed softly. "And recall Veras Maul and the 8th Infantry. We have our answers; they can abandon their hunt for Jorkins and help us here."

The captain nodded and saluted. "Yes, sir. Get some rest, Esdras."

Esdras nodded, already settling into bed and turning to face Katie as the captain glided off into the night. "You get some rest, too, my love. It's been a long day."

Katie sighed and leaned in to give him a kiss before making the trek back to the Gryffindor dorms. "You have no idea. No idea at all."

Morning dawned, and Esdras was awoken by the sunlight streaming in through the tall windows. He stretched and took account of the new tissue growth during the night. His abdomen was completely healed up and his arm and legs each had a good six inches of new growth to them. He illuminated his eyes and startled. Sitting in the chair beside

his bed, staring intently into the distance, was Cho. Her voice was a barely perceptible whisper as she spoke. "He's gone. He's really gone."

Esdras paused and took his human form before regarding the raven haired girl at his side. "Yes, he is."

Cho gasped and tried to hold in the tears, but failed. She brought her hands to shield her face as she sobbed miserably. Her voice was thick with sorrow when she spoke again. "I don't know what to do, Esdras."

The Dementor quietly smoothed out the bed sheets. He was slow to speak, choosing instead to gather his thoughts. When he was ready, he started slowly. "I remember the first mortal I killed. His name was Bagby, prisoner number gamma beta 332, charged with use of the Avada Kedavra against his wife in 1805. He had no remorse, even spat at me as I moved in for the Kiss. In my youth and arrogance, I actually thought that some mortals deserved to die."

Cho listened patiently and shook her head. "Why tell me this?"

Esdras raised his only hand. "I'm getting to it." He sighed and closed his eyes. "In 1812, Aaron and I were part of the Infantry division sent to monitor the French advance into Russia during the Muggle Napoleonic War. It was bitterly cold that winter, a lot of mortals who had done nothing except follow their orders died for no reason. These were completely innocent people who were being led to their death. We would actually perform the Kiss out of mercy so that they wouldn't feel the pain of freezing to death. It was then that I grew up and realized that no one deserves to die." He reached out and took her hand. "But death comes to us all, good or bad, mortal or Dementor. We cannot avoid it. Not even I am immune, and I am descended from a deity."

The mortal sobbed softly and squeezed his hand. "So what do we do?"

Glowing green eyes regarded her softly before he gave a sad smile. "We live our lives as best we can. We mourn when we have to and keep memories in our hearts. But we have to keep moving, keep

gliding forward. I can't make this loss any easier for you, Cho. No one can, but I can promise you that you will never be alone."

Cho nodded, the tears still fresh in her eyes. Esdras was not surprised when she collapsed next to him and buried her head against his shoulder. He merely floated over and made more room for her on the bed. It was many minutes before he heard the faintest whisper coming from the glowing soul beside him. "What happens to us when we die?"

The Dementor sighed and shook his head. "I don't know, but I can tell you what Azkaban lore says." At Cho's nod, he continued. "Our legends say that when you die, if you have lived a good and virtuous life in service of the gods, you will find yourself in a beautiful garden of silver mint. You will not worry, you will not want. All your friends and loved ones will be with you, even those of other species will be able to visit. For the gods decreed that any who takes a Dementor into their heart will never be parted from their friend."

The tears had stopped, and Esdras was pleased to see that Cho had stopped crying. Her eyes were still red and puffy, but she had a small smile on her face. "Cedric was your friend, too. So there's a chance that we could all be together in your eternal mint garden?"

Esdras smiled and hugged Cho close. "I couldn't think of anyone I'd rather have with me...except Katie, but that goes without saying."

Cho laughed, for the first time in a long time. "Well, of course."

It was four days before Esdras was released from the Hospital Wing, the night before leaving Hogwarts. The supersolenoid organ had already completely healed the Dementor's right arm since, for a Dementor that is able to float, arms are more important than legs. His legs were still stumps that terminated just above the ankles, though. Madame Pomfrey looked at the stumps curiously. "Well, so long as you don't walk anywhere...I don't see any problem with letting you go."

Dr. Transom let out an impatient huff. "I've been saying that since his hand came back in. By Azkaban standards, he's been fit for duty for a day now."

Pomfrey turned and stared into the hood of the doctor. Her voice was sharp. "We're not on Azkaban, doctor. So you'll forgive me if I don't go by Azkaban rules when one of my students has taken a beating that nearly killed him. Quidditch injuries are one thing, but a triple amputation with decapitation and supersolenoid fracture is something else entirely. I will release him when I say the time is right." She quickly turned and smiled at Esdras, her voice light and cheerful. "The time is right, Esdras. Get going, it's almost time for dinner." Her voice then took a more serious tone. "They'll be holding a memorial for Cedric tonight."

The Dementor gave a somber nod and floated out of bed. He grabbed his cloak before floating quickly out of the Hospital Wing with a smile and a wave. He had almost made it down the hall when twinned mortal and Dementor voices called after him. "And no afterburners until you're totally healed!"

Esdras huffed and began the long float up towards the Ravenclaw common room, he would need a shower and a fresh set of robes after being in hospital for so long. He gave the password to the steadfast suit of armor guarding the door to the common room and stepped inside.

There was a mixture of cheers and surprised exclamations from the more perceptive Ravenclaws. Roger looked curiously at the Dementor as he approached the fireplace. "You've got no feet, Esdras."

The Dementor rolled his eyes. "I float as my natural means of locomotion. I think I can get by without them for the evening." He looked up to the clock and narrowed his eyes. "I think we should all go down to dinner together. Wait for me, I won't be long."

The mortal gave a nod of assent as Esdras quickly glided to the dormitory stairwell. He was gone for only ten minutes, long enough for him to take an icy shower and change into clean robes and grab a freshly pressed uniform cloak.

By the time he returned to the common room, most of the house had already made the move downstairs for dinner. Only the Quidditch team remained. The other five players carefully flanked the seeker, trying their best to protect Cho from what was she was about to experience.

No words needed to be said. Esdras merely walked to the front of the group and led them out through the portrait hole. The imposing height of his Dementor form would scare off any unwanted attention for Cho. That was what he wanted. As the staircase slid into place, the Dementor sighed. He looked over his shoulder to his somber friends. "Forward mourn."

Chapter 21 – Closer Together

The morning of the student's departure from Hogwarts was bright and warm. Esdras had floated happily over to the Gryffindor table to show off his new feet which he had managed to grow during the night. Aaron had succeeded in delivering the final deployment report and was speaking quietly to Katie in Azkabaaner while Esdras reviewed the documents. *"So that was about the time he proposed to her. I told him he was making a terrible mistake and that she didn't love him, but he wouldn't listen to me. It wasn't until he overheard Lara discussing how she was going to use the money that he started to open his eyes."*

Katie's voice was shocked. *"So he was actually engaged to Lara Sidara? I thought they couldn't stand each other."*

Esdras coughed and interrupted. *"There was a time when we were...quite friendly. But we were engaged for a month about a century and a half ago. I doubt your grandparents were even born at that time."* He gave her a sad smile that didn't reach his eyes. *"I had hoped that you would never meet her or even hear about her. I was a different person back when I was seeing Sidara. I'd like to think I've improved on who I was when I was young and stupid."*

The mortal nodded softly and took his hand. *"I understand. It's just that sometimes I forget that you're so much older than me. But I don't want you to think that you have to hide anything from me."* Her voice took on a curious tone. *"So what is her position now?"*

Esdras sighed. *"She's warden of Azkaban prison. She's one of the more important Dementor officers."*

Katie looked impressed and, after a quiet second, smiled playfully and winked at Esdras. *"So how did she take the break up?"*

The Dementor laughed. *"Like any gold digger would. She was angrier that she got caught than she was that I was leaving her. After that, Aaron and I took a foreign service tour of duty and worked in Asia for a few decades. There's not much room for promotion there so that's why she's farther up the chain of command these days."*

Aaron nodded. *"And it's also why we like Asian food."* The three shared a laugh together before Aaron sighed and switched back into English, all private subjects having been discussed. "I should probably check on the patrols. Loading up the train is always stressful and confusing. I may just double the patrols."

Esdras shrugged. "We could go either way; I'll leave it your discretion. Make use of the 212th and 1102nd Divisions if you have to. Both of them are Guard certified and should be able to handle making sure everyone gets onto the train safely."

The captain rose and saluted. "Yes, Lord Admiral." He paused for a moment and regarded his friend. "And Esdras, the Oracle has arrived again. She has said that she's ready to perform the ritual whenever you are."

Esdras raised a mortal eyebrow at his friend and quickly looked nervous. "Tell her then that we will meet her immediately on the roof of the Astronomy tower. It is an easily defensible position and will afford us the required amount of privacy."

Aaron again nodded and floated off towards the door. Once he had gone, Esdras rose and extended a hand to Katie. "You heard what he said, the Oracle is ready. If you still want to be closer to me, now is your chance. I won't blame you if you want to back out."

Without hesitation, Katie took his hand. "I've been waiting for this all year. Do you really think I'm going to back out now?"

The Dementor stared deep into her eyes, piercing her very soul. "You may well once you find out what I will have to do."

The beautiful sunny day was even more pronounced at the top of the Astronomy tower. Katie and Esdras had an unobstructed view of the massive First Infantry escorting the Oracle of Azkaban on her way to meet them. Three hundred Dementors strong, the First Infantry was the largest of the Azkaban Infantry units, and rivaled many of the Azkaban Fleets in size.

As the Oracle floated down to the tower, her guards formed a shield, encircling the observation deck and facing outwards. Once they were completely surrounded, the handler released the Oracle and she floated calmly towards the pair. *"Hail, mighty Demnin, god of death. Grant forgiveness to my guards, they do tend to go overboard at times, but I love them all as if they were my own sons and daughters."*

Esdras and Katie both rose up from where they had knelt. In his Dementor form, Esdras took the small cloakling into his arms. *"The great Oracle again mistakes me for my divine ancestor. Yet no forgiveness shall be granted where no offense is made. The protection of the Oracle is paramount, your guards bring honor upon themselves with their actions."*

Katie smirked softly as she saw the Dementors within earshot straighten up a bit in pride. She approached the two Dementors and smiled brightly. *"Greetings, great Oracle. Aaron had said that you were ready, and that you could bring Esdras and me closer?"*

The Oracle, nestled in the Admiral's arms, calmly regarded the mortal for a moment. Finally, Esdras spoke, but Katie knew immediately that he was speaking for the Oracle. *"The spells are prepared, but be warned, mortal child, they are incredibly dangerous. They must be applied directly to your soul."* Esdras gasped, and Katie could now tell that he was speaking for himself. *"I must Kiss you, Katie. I must take your soul for this to happen."*

The mortal, for the first time since the prospect of intimacy with her beloved was mentioned, balked. She steeled herself and looked deep into Esdras' hood. *"You'll be the one to do it?"*

Esdras nodded. *"I have to. I perform the Kiss, I perform the spells. The Oracle will guide me. Then, your soul will be returned."*

Katie nodded nervously. *"What will you do to me?"*

The Oracle herself spoke this time; her voice was a small, childlike whisper. *"Upon your very soul, the mighty Demnin will place a part of his own soul. In this manner will you never feel the cold, see the dark, or experience the pain of his being close to you."*

Esdras smiled. *"I won't need the mark thirteen inhibitor spells anymore when I'm around you."*

The mortal nodded, deep in thought. When she finally looked at the pair of Dementors again, she was resolute. *"Will it hurt?"*

The Oracle's voice was sad. *"More than you could ever imagine. But the procedure can be reversed at any time, should you no longer desire it. The reversing procedure will hurt Esdras just as much as this will hurt you."*

Katie shivered, but put on a brave face. She turned to face Esdras and smiled the best seductive smile she could come up with, knowing that she was facing temporary death. *"I don't think we'll have to worry about reversing this, will we? Pucker up, lover boy."*

Esdras released the Oracle and glided silently up to Katie. Ritualistically, he drew back his hood, his pure white hair shining in the sun. He took her head in his hands and leaned in slowly. He breathed a whisper before he touched his lips to hers. *"I am so sorry."*

As his lips touched hers, Katie felt as if she had been hit with a harsh winter wind. All the warmth in her body began to flow from her limbs, and in her fear, she struggled, trying to pry Esdras' hands from her face. Then, the pain came, a horrible, all encompassing pain, emotional and physical all at once. She could remember schoolyard insults, her brother teasing her, her parents angry at her for not cleaning her room, the time she broke her arm playing Quidditch, her grandmother's funeral, everything. The last memory she was left with was, ironically enough, the feeling of betrayal when she had first realized Esdras was a Dementor. Then, there was only darkness.

Esdras sobbed softly as he carefully lowered the stilled mortal form to the ground. Ice decorated his hands where her tears had frozen to his skin. Held within his left hand was a glowing silver crystal, the soul of Katherine Elizabeth Bell. He looked to the Oracle, desperate. *"We must hurry. Tell me what to do."*

The small floating form hovered just over his shoulder. *"My Lord would do well to relax, her body lives and her soul is safe. This*

procedure must not be rushed." When she was sure he was calm, she continued. *"You must extract your own soul first, my Lord."*

The Dementor nodded and began to chant the requisite ancient spell. Soon enough a multifaceted, glowing black crystal sprung forth from the center of his cloaked chest. Esdras stared down at the dark crystal; he would be able to survive for only a limited amount of time without his soul...one of the many immortality provisions. *"Now what?"*

The Oracle glided back and forth, observing the proceedings. *"Place the souls together, joining yours at the eighth facet to hers at the third facet."*

Esdras carefully oriented the crystals until the desired facets were facing each other and pressed them together. The silver crystal began to glow black and the black began to glow silver. The Oracle wrapped her arms around Esdras' neck and the rightful king began to recite the necessary spell. *"Let my darkness be your light, let my coldness be your warmth, and in return let my life be yours. Let your light be my darkness, let your warmth be my coldness, and in return let your life be mine. The gods will see that we are together, together forever."*

The souls returned to their original colors, Esdras' glowing black and Katie's glowing silver. The Oracle nodded softly. *"It is finished, my Lord. She is immune to your power."*

Esdras nodded quickly and hurriedly placed the silver crystal close to Katie's lips. He watched happily as it sank into her mouth and, after a few seconds pause, her eyes opened. She gasped softly at the sight before her. Esdras knelt before her with his soul bared, literally. The black crystal still rested outside his body. She smiled as he took her hand and placed it on the crystal, guiding her to push it slowly back into his chest. The mortal kept her hand resting there for a long while. *"I don't feel any different."*

The Dementors nodded and Esdras shifted into his mortal form to smile brightly at her. *"You won't. That's the beauty of this magic. But I will never be able to chill you, or feed from you, or even Kiss you. You are immune to me."*

Katie smirked softly and crawled over to lean into his arms. "I don't think I'll ever be immune to you, Esdras."

The shining red Hogwarts Express billowed steam as the last of the students clambered aboard. Esdras stood on the platform with his five captains. Reaping, Maul, Redoubt, Transom, and Kirin all stood at attention while the admiral gave his final orders. "*Aaron, have the Thirteenth Infantry trail the train until it reaches King's Cross, then return back to Azkaban by way of the Ministry Floo connection. The rest of you, see to the continued needs of the civilian population as they begin the return trip to Azkaban. I will regroup with you all on the island for debriefing as soon as I have seen Katie back to Bellmont.*"

The captains all saluted and responded in chorus. "Yes, Lord Admiral."

Four of them floated off, leaving the Lord Admiral alone with his friend. Aaron Reaping sighed and looked pensively at the train. "*Things will not get any easier, Esdras. There are already reports of Death Eater activity in the Yorkshire region. I'm fully prepared to believe that what Harry saw is actually the truth.*"

Esdras nodded. "*Until we know otherwise, what Harry saw is the truth. But I have a feeling we'll know soon enough. If the events of the last war were any indication, Voldemort should begin courting the creatures he thinks he can turn against the mortals. And at the top of his list will be us, and I will be the one he'll come to. All we have to do is wait.*"

Aaron looked to his friend in shock. "You seem mighty calm about all this."

The rightful king of Azkaban nodded. "*We have allied ourselves with the right side. The path will not be easy, but it will lead to victory.*" His attention was grabbed by a tapping sound and he turned to see Katie waving at him through the window. He smirked before turning back to his friend. "*I have to get going. Drinks at Masha Tavern when I get back to the island?*"

The captain laughed and nodded, rising up into the air to join his men. *"I'll meet you there."*

Esdras waved his men off and ran forward to jump onto the train just as it began moving. He climbed aboard and proceeded down the aisle until he came to the cabin which Katie had taken. Surprisingly, she was alone. At his inquisitive raised eyebrow, she merely smiled. "I simply thought we'd test out the Oracle's spell...make sure they really work as well as they're supposed to."

The Dementor could very easily detect the nervousness in her voice as he closed the door and locked it. "On the train? Really now, Katie..."

The lovely mortal glared playfully at him. She rose up from her seat and carefully placed both arms loosely around his neck. "Fine then, call it a fourth challenge, my Triwizard Champion."

Esdras rolled his eyes. "Challenges, challenges, always with the challenges." He sighed dramatically. "Very well, then. What are the rules for this particular challenge?"

Katie smiled and pulled out a single bronze Knut. "It's very simple. Heads, I win. Tails, you lose." Her voice took on a tone that made Esdras shiver, or maybe it was her teeth on his earlobe. "And the winner gets the loser."

THE END of TRIAL OF THE GUARDIAN

But don't worry, Esdras Demnin will be back in...

IN SERVICE OF THE ORDER

The third book in the "Guardian of Azkaban" series.